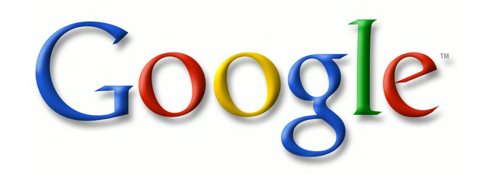
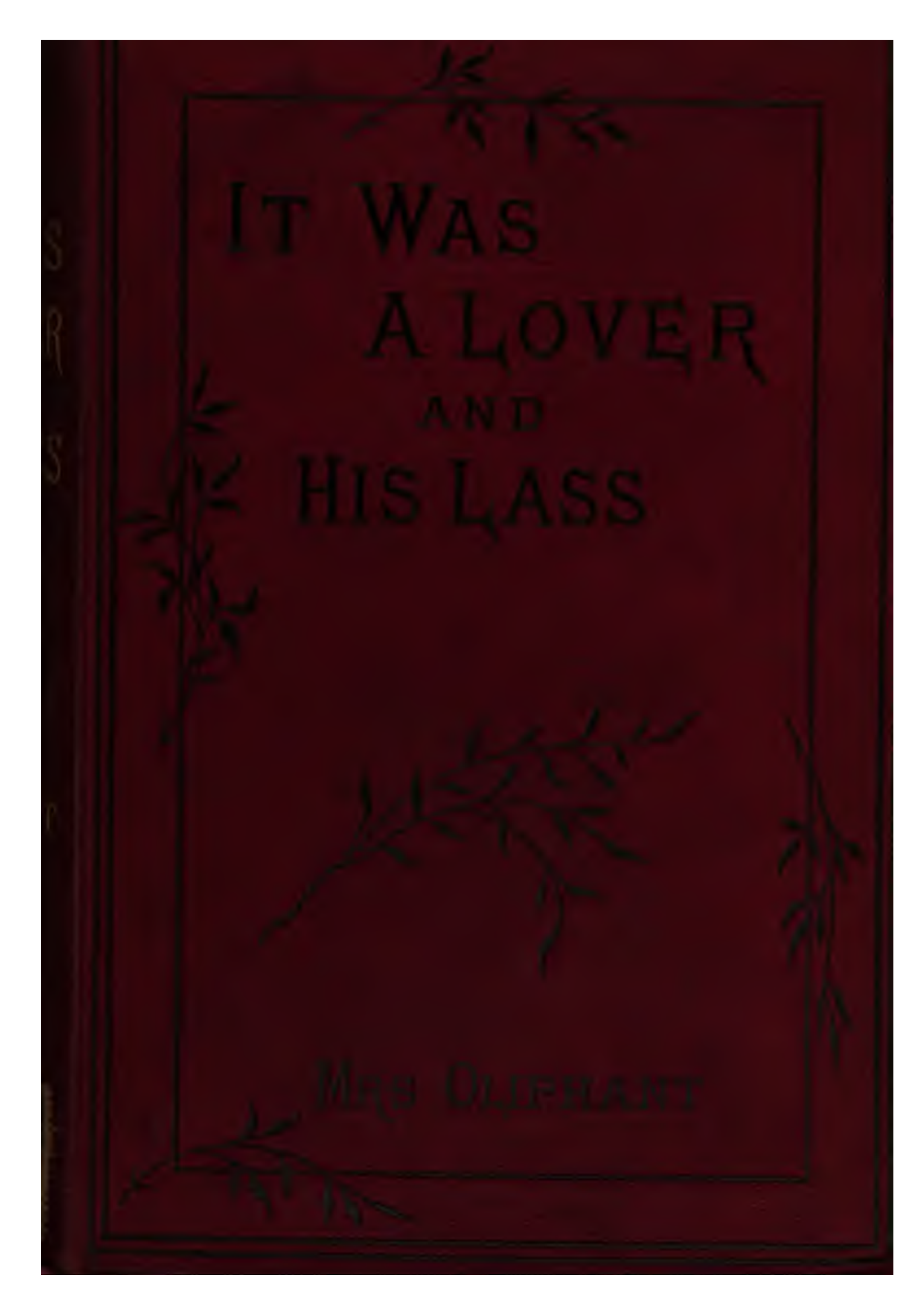





IT WAS
A LOVER
AND
HIS LASS
MRS OLIPHANT


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IT WAS A LOVER AND HIS LASS.

VOL. III.

IT WAS A LOVER AND HIS LASS

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT

AUTHOR OF

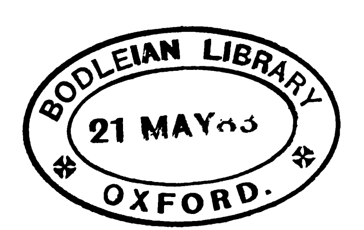
"MRS. MARGARET MAITLAND," "AGNES,"
"ADAM GRAEME OF MOSSGRAY,"
ETC., ETC.

Truly, young gentlemen . . . there was no great matter in the ditty
As You Like It.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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IT WAS A LOVER AND HIS LASS.

CHAPTER I.

THE house of Gowanbrae was not an old historical house, like the castle of Murkley. It had no associations ranging back into the mists. It was half a cottage, half a country mansion-house, built upon a slope, so that the house was one story higher on one side than on the other. The ground descended from the back to a wooded dell, in which ran a sparkling, noisy burn, like a cottage girl, always busy, singing about its work as it trickled over its pebbles. The view from the higher windows commanded a great sweep of country, long moorlands and pastures, with here and there a comfortable farm-steading, and a group of carefully cultivated fields. The noble Tay

sweeping down into its estuary was not more unlike the burn than this modest, cosy villa was unlike the old ancestral house, with its black wainscot and deep walls. The grandfather of Margaret and Jean had built it with his Indian money when he came back after a lifetime of service in the East—hard, and long, and unbroken, such as used to be, when a man would not see his native country or belongings for twenty years at a stretch. This old officer's daughter had not been a sufficient match for the heir of Murkley, but it was a fortunate circumstance afterwards for Margaret and Jean that their mother's little property was settled upon them. Everything in the house was bright but homely. It had always been delightful to Lilias, to whom Gowanbrae meant all the freedom of childhood, open air, and rural life. She was not the lady or princess there, and even Margaret acknowledged the relaxation of state which this made possible. But, when the little family travelled thither on this occasion, the charm of the old life was a little broken. Not a word had been said to Lilias of Lewis' proceedings. She was told drily in Jean's presence by Miss Margaret, who gave her sister a severe look of

warning, that Mr. Murray had called to say good-bye, but that it had not been thought necessary to call her.

'You have seen but little of him,' Margaret said.

Lilias did not make any remark. She did not think it necessary to tell how much she had seen of Lewis, and, to tell the truth, she did not think it certain that an opportunity of saying good-bye to him personally would not be afforded to her. But, as a matter-of-fact, there was no further meeting between the two, and Lilias left Murkley with a little surprise, and not without a little pique, that he should have made no attempt to take his leave of her. She had various agitating scenes with Katie to make up for it, and on the other hand an anxious visit from Mrs. Stormont, full of excitement and indignation.

'What can take Margaret away at this moment? it is just extraordinary,' that lady said, in the stress of her disappointment. 'For I cannot suppose, Jean, my dear, that you have anything to do with it. Dear me, can she not let well alone? Where could you be better than at Murkley?'

'We are both fond of our own house,' Jean said, with gentle self-assertion.

'Bless me!' cried Mrs. Stormont, 'are you not just the same as in your own house? I am sure, though it belongs to Lilias, that Margaret is mistress and more.'

'—And Lilias is fain, fain to get to Gowanbrae. She was always fond of the place—and we think her looking white, and that a change will do her good.'

'Oh! I am very well aware Margaret will never want for reasons for what she does,' cried the indignant mother.

Meanwhile Katie was sobbing on Lilias' shoulder. 'He says he will go away. He says he cannot face it, his mother will just drive him out of his senses; and what is to become of me with nobody to speak to?' Katie cried.

'Oh! Katie, cannot you just wait awhile?—you are younger than I am,' said Lilias, in desperation.

'And when I think that we might just have been going on as happy as ever, if it had not been you forsaking us!' cried Katie.

Lilias was too magnanimous to defend herself. She treated the departure as a great ordinance of Nature against which there was not a word to be said. But when the last evening passed, and nowhere in park or wood did there appear any trace

of the figure which had grown so familiar to her, to say a word or look a look, it cannot be denied that a certain disappointment mingled with the surprise in Lilias' heart. She could not understand it. Though Margaret thought they had seen so little of each other, there had been, indeed, a good deal of intercourse. Lilias was very sure it had always been accidental intercourse, but still they had met, and talked, and exchanged a great many opinions, and that he should not have felt any desire to see her again was a bewilderment to the girl. She did not say a syllable on the subject, by which even Miss Jean concluded that it was of no importance to her, but, as in most similar cases, Lilias thought the more. She looked out with a little anxiety as her sisters and she drove to the station in their little brougham. They passed on the road the rough, country gig which belonged to the 'Murkley Arms,' which Adam was driving in the same direction.

'Are you leaving the country too, Adam?—all the good folk are going away,' Miss Margaret said, as they passed.

'It's no me, mem, it's our gentleman. He's away twa-three days ago, and this is just his luggitch,' said Adam.

'Dear me, when the season's just begun!'

'The season is of awfu' little importance to a gentleman that is nae hand at the fishing, nor at naething I ken of, except making scarts upon a paper,' said Adam, contemptuously. He was left speaking like the orators in Parliament, and only half of this sentence reached the ears of the ladies as they drove on. This was all Lilias heard of the young man who had been the first stranger with whom she had ever formed any friendship: which was the light in which she thought she regarded him. She had never talked so much to anyone who was not connected with her by some tie of relationship or old connection, and that very fact had added freshness and reality to their intercourse. It had been a new element introduced into her life. Why had he gone away without any reason? He had said nothing of any such purpose. On the contrary, they had talked together of the woods in autumn and the curling in winter, all of which he had intended, she was sure, to make acquaintance with. Why had everything changed so suddenly in his plans as well as in theirs? It did not seem possible that there should be any connection between the one and the other; but a vague curiosity and bewilderment arose in the

girl's mind. But it did not occur to her to ask Jean or Margaret for information. He was Jean's friend: it would have been natural enough to ask her where he had gone, or why he had left Murkley? But she did not, though she could not explain to herself any reason why.

And the question was one which returned often to her mind during the winter. The nearest post town was several miles off, and there were no very near neighbours, so that by times when the roads were bad or the weather wild, they were lonely in Gowanbrae. Of old, Lilias had never known what it was to have time hang heavy on her hands. She had a hundred things to do; but now insensibly her childish occupations had fallen from her, she could scarcely tell how. She missed the park, she missed the river-side. She missed, above all, the great, vacant, unfinished palace, with its eyeless windows staring into the gloom. Her dreams seemed now to have no settled habitation, they roamed about the world, now here, now there, wondering about a great many things which had never excited her curiosity before. It seemed to Lilias for the first time that she would take to travel, to see new scenes, to make acquaintance with the

places spoken of in books—indeed, she turned to books themselves with a feeling very different from anytbing she had felt before. Till now they had been inextricably associated with lessons. Now lessons, though she still continued a semblance of work under Margaret's eye, seemed to have floated away from her as things of the past, and Lilias began to read poetry eagerly, to dive into the mysteries of sentiment which hitherto had only wearied her. She was growing older, she thought, and that was the reason. Pages of measured verse which a few months before her eye had gone blankly over in search of a story now became delightful to her. Things that even Margaret and Jean turned from, she devoured with avidity. She became familiar with those seeming philosophies which delight the youthful intelligence, and liked shyly and silently to enter, in her own mind, into questions about constancy and the eternal duration of love, and whether it was possible to love twice, a question, of course, decided almost violently in the negative in Lilias' heart. No one knew anything of those developments, nor were they in any way consciously connected with the events of the summer. Indeed, no change had taken place

officially in the character of Lilias' dreams. The hero of six feet two, with his hair like night, and his mystical dark eyes, had not been dethroned—heaven forbid!—in favour of any smiling middle-sized person, with a complexion the same colour as his hair. No such desecration had happened. The hero still stood in the background, serene and magnificent; he saved the heroine's life periodically in a variety of ways, always at the hazard of his own. He had never been amusing in conversation; it was not part of his *rôle;* and when she thought of another quite insignificant individual occupying an entirely different position, who would talk and smile, and tell of a hundred unknown scenes, beguiling away the hours, or play as no one had ever played in her hearing, Lilias felt that the infidelity to her hero was venial. It was indeed an effort on her part to think not less but more of her friend on this latter account, for, as has been said, 'the piano' was not a popular attribute of a young man in those days in Scotland. People in general would have almost preferred that he should do something a little wrong. Gambling, perhaps, was excessive, but a little high play was pardonable in comparison. Music was a lady's privilege—the prerogative of a girl

who was accomplished. But Lilias forgave Lewis his music. She resorted to his idea in those dull days somewhat fondly, if such a word may be used, but not with love—far from it. She had never thought of love in connection with him. That was entirely an abstract sentiment, so far as she was aware, vaguely linked to six feet two and unfathomable eyes.

The whole house was a little out of joint. They had come to Gowanbrae when they had not intended to do so, for one thing. All their previous plans had been formed for Murkley, and various things were wanting to their comfort, which, under other circumstances, would have been supplied. For instance, there were new curtains and carpets wanted, which Miss Margaret must have seen to had they intended from the first to winter there, but which, with the prospect of a season in London before them, could not be thought of. The garden was to have been re-modelled under the eye of a new gardener, and a new greenhouse was to have been built during their absence; but they had returned while these improvements were in course of carrying out.

Gowanbrae, in fact, was better adapted for summer than for winter. When the hills were

covered with snow, the prospect was melancholy, and down by the burn, though it was lovely, it was damp in the autumn rains. The broad drive in the park, between old Murkley and new, had always supplied a dry and cheerful walk, and even the well-gravelled road by the Tay was sumptuous in comparison with the muddy roads wending by farmsteadings over boggy soil towards the moors. Indoors, to be sure, all was cheerful, but even there disturbing imaginations would enter. Miss Jean would spend hours playing the music which Lewis had left with her, and which was a little above her powers. Her pretty 'pieces,' the gentle 'reveries' and compositions that were quite within her range, the Scotch airs which she played so sweetly, were given up, with a little contempt and a great deal of ambition, for Mozart and Beethoven; and the result was not exhilarating. When Margaret said, 'I would far rather hear your Scotch tunes,' Jean would smile and sigh, with a little conscious pride in her own preference of the best, and play the 'Flowers of the Forest' or 'Tweedside' with an air of gentle condescension, which made her sister laugh, and took the charm out of the pretty performance, which once had been the pride of the house. As for Lilias, she was

more indulgent to these reminiscences of the past. It did not trouble her, as it might have done had her ear been finer, to hear the stumbling and faltering of Jean's fingers in her attempt to render what the practised hands of the other had done so easily. On the contrary, in the long winter evenings, when the house was shut up by four o'clock, Lilias, with her book of poetry, whatever it might be—and her appetite was so large that she was not so fastidious as perhaps she ought to have been—half buried in a deep easy chair by the fire, would catch, as it were, an echo of the finer strain as her sister laboured at it, and liked it as it linked itself, broken, yet full of association, with the other kind of music she was reading. Sometimes, when Margaret was absent, there would be a little colloquy between the pair.

'That is bonnie, Jean. Play just that little bit again.'

'Which bit, my darling?—the beginning of the andante?'

Miss Jean had learned from Lewis to speak more learnedly than was natural.

'Oh, what do I know about your andantes? Play *that*—just that little flowery bit—it's like the meadows in the spring.'

'I wish Mr. Murray, poor lad, could have heard you call it that.'

'Why is he a poor lad? I thought he was very well off. You always speak of him in that little sighing tone.'

'Do I, my dear? Oh, he is well enough in fortune—but there are more things needed than fortune to make a young man happy.'

Upon which Lilias laughed, yet blushed as well—not for consciousness, but because she was at the stage when the very name of love brings the colour to a girl's cheek.

'He must have a story, or you would not speak of him so. He must be in love——'

'He is just that: and little hope. I think of him many a day, poor lad, and with a sore heart.'

'Did he tell you? did he say who it was? Is it anybody we know? Tell me, tell me the story, Jean!'

'Not for the world. Do you think I would break his trust and tell his secret? And whisht, whisht; Margaret is not fond of the name of him,' Jean would say; while Lilias dropped back into her book, and the 'Andante' was slowly beaten out of the old piano again.

This was all Miss Jean dared to do on behalf

of Lewis; but she had a great many thoughts of him, as she said. She had imagined many situations in which they might meet again, but as the time drew nearer it occurred to her often to wonder whether he would find it so easy as she had once thought to find the Miss Murrays of Murkley in town. Margaret had been receiving circulars from house-agents, communications from letters of lodgings, counsels from friends without number—from all which it began to become apparent to Miss Jean that, big place as Edinburgh was, it was nothing to London. Would they be so sure to meet as he had thought? He did not know London any more than they did, and there rose before Miss Jean's eyes a melancholy picture of two people vainly searching after each other, and meeting never. Naturally, as the year went on, they talked a great deal on this subject. Margaret decided at last that to take lodgings would be the best, as the transportation of servants to London would be an expensive matter, besides their inacquaintance with the ways of town: while, on the other hand, she herself shrank from the unknown danger of temporary London servants, if all was true that was said of them.

'Though half of it at least will be nonsense,'

Miss Margaret remarked. 'You would think they were not human creatures to hear what is said in the papers; in my experience, men and women are very like other men and women wherever you go.'

'And do you think it will be so very big a place that without an address—if such a thing were to happen,' said Miss Jean—in her own opinion, with great astuteness—'you would not be able to find out a friend?'

'Your friend would be a silly one indeed if she went about the world without an address,' said Miss Margaret; but after a moment she added—'It would depend, I should say, whether she was in what is called society or not. When you are in society you meet every kind of person. You cannot be long without coming across everybody.'

'And shall we be in society, Margaret?' said Lilias, unexpectedly interposing.

'My dear,' said Miss Margaret, 'what do you suppose we are going to London for?—to see the pictures, which are no such great things to see when all's done: or to hear the concerts, which Jean may go to, but not me for one? Or perhaps you think to the May meetings, as they call them, to hear all the missionary men

giving an account of the way to save souls. I would like to be sure first how to take care of my own.'

'We must see all the pictures and go to the concerts; and the play and whatever is going on, of course?' said Lilias. 'Yes, I know society means something more. We are going into the world, we are going to Court. Of course that must be the very best society,' the girl said, with her serious face.

'Well, then, there is no need for me to answer your question,' said Miss Margaret, composedly. 'Society is just the great object in London. It is a big place, the biggest in the world; but society is no bigger than a person with her wits about her can easily, easily learn by headmark. I understand that you will meet the same people at all the places, as you do in a far smaller town.'

'Then in that way,' said Miss Jean, with a little eagerness, 'you could just be sure to foregather with your friend, even though he had no address?'

'And who may this friend be,' said Miss Margaret, 'that you are so anxious to meet?'

'Oh, nobody!' said Miss Jean, confused. 'I mean,' she added, 'I was just thinking of a chance that might happen. You and me, Margaret, we have both old friends that have disappeared from us in London——'

'And that is true,' Miss Margaret said. The words seemed to awaken old associations in her mind. She sighed and shook her head. 'Plenty have done that,' she said. 'It is just like a great sea where the shipwrecks are many, and some sail away into the dark, and are never heard of more.'

Under cover of this natural sentiment, Miss Jean sailed off too out of her sister's observation. She had given a sudden quick look at Lilias, and it had occurred to her with a curious sensation that Lilias knew what she meant. It was a momentary glance, the twinkling of an eye, and no more; but that is enough to set up a private intelligence between two souls. Jean felt a little guilty afterwards, as if she had been teaching her young sister the elements of conspiracy. But this was not at all the case. She had done nothing, or so very little, to bring Lewis to her mind that it was not worth thinking of. Nevertheless, it was a great revelation to her, and startled her much, that Lilias understood. No, no, there was no conspiracy! Margaret herself could not object to meet him in society; and, if they did not succeed in this, Jean had no notion where the young stranger, in whom she took so great an interest, was to be found.

Thus, with many a consultation and many an

arrangement, often modified and changed as time went on, the winter stole away. It seemed very long as it passed, but it was short to look back upon, and, after the new year, a gradually growing excitement took possession of the quiet household. From Simon, who, the other servants thought, gave himself great airs, and could scarcely open his mouth without making some reference to the memorable time when he was body-servant to the General, and had been in London, and seen the clubs and all the sights, or uttering some doubt as to the changes which might have passed since that time; to Miss Margaret, upon whose shoulders was the charge of everything, there was no one who did not feel the thrill of the coming change. The maids who were not going were loud in their declarations that they did not care, and would not have liked it, if Miss Margaret had asked them—but they were all bitterly derisive of Simon as an old fool who thought he knew London, and was just as proud of it as if it were a strange language.

'You could not make much more fuss if it was to France you were going,' the women said.

'To France! As if there was onything in France that was equal to London, the biggest

ceety in the world, the place where you could get the best of everything; where there were folk enough to people Scotland, if onything went amiss.'

'And what should go amiss? Does the man think the world will stand still when he's no here,' the maids said.

'Aweel, I do not know what ye will do without me. But to let the ladies depart from here, alone in the world, and me not with them is what I could not do,' Simon said.

Miss Margaret was almost as deeply moved by the sense of her responsibilities. Many of them she kept to herself, not desiring to overwhelm the gentle mind of Jean, or to frighten Lilias with the numberless difficulties that seemed to arise in the way. The choice of the lodgings alone was enough to have put a feebler woman distraught altogether, and Margaret, who had never been in London, found it no easy task to choose a neighbourhood which should be unexceptionable, and from whence it would be a right thing to produce a lovely *débutante.* When we say that there were unprincipled persons who recommended Russell Square to her as a proper place of residence, the perils with which Margaret was surrounded may be imagined. It

was almost by chance that she selected Cadogan Place, which is a place no lady need be ashamed of living in. It was Margaret's opinion ever after, pronounced whenever her advice was asked as to the ways and means of settling in town, of which her experience was so great, that this was a matter in which advice did more harm than good.

'There is just one thing,' she would say, with the conscious superiority of one who had bought her information dearly, and understood the subject *au fond*, 'and everything else is of little importance in comparison. Never you consult your friends. Just hear what the business persons have to say, and form your own opinion. You know what you want yourself, and they know what they have to give—but friends know neither the one nor the other.'

This was severe, but no doubt she knew what she was saying. For two months beforehand her mind was occupied with little else, and every post brought shoals of letters on the subject. You would have thought the half of London was stirred with expectation. To Miss Jean it seemed only natural. She was pleased that the advent of Margaret should cause so much emotion, and that the way would thus be prepared for Lilias.

'Of course it will be a treat for them to see Margaret; there are not many people like Margaret: and then, my darling, you, under her wing, will be just like the bonnie star that trembles near the moon.'

'I hope you don't mean that Margaret is like the moon,' said Lilias, recovering something of her saucy ways since this excitement had got into the air.

She laughed, but she, too, felt it very natural. There was no extravagance of pride about these gentlewomen. They were aware indeed of their own position, but they were not proud. It was all so simple: even Lilias could not divest herself of the idea that it would be something for the London people to see Margaret in her velvet with all her point lace, and the diamonds which had been her mother's. There was, however, another great question to be decided, which the head of the house herself opened in full family conclave as one upon which it was only right that the humbler members of the family should have their say.

'The question is, who is to present us?' Miss Margaret said. 'Her aunt, my Lady Dalgainly, would be the right person for Lilias. But I'm not anxious to be indebted to that side of the house.'

'Would it not be a right thing to ask the countess?' said Miss Jean.

It had already been decided that one Court dress was as much as each property could afford, and that Jean was not to go, a decision which distressed Lilias, who wanted her sister to see her in all her glory, and could scarcely resign herself to any necessity which should make Jean miss that sight.

'The countess would be the proper person,' said Margaret; 'but blood is thicker than water, and suppose she had not you and me to care for her, Jean, where could she turn to but her mother's family?'

Here Lilias made a little spring into the centre of the group, as was her way.

'I have read in the papers,' she said, 'all about it. Margaret, this is what you will do: the countess will present you—for who else could do it?—and then you will present me. I will have no other,' cried Lilias, with a little imperative clap of her hands.

'Was there ever such a creature? She just knows everything,' Miss Jean cried.

CHAPTER II.

THE spring was very early that year. It had been a severe winter, and even on the moors the leap of the fresh life of the grass out of the snows was sudden; but when the ladies found themselves transported to the fresh green in Cadogan Place, it is impossible to say what an exhilarating effect this revelation had upon them. The elder sisters, indeed, had visited London in their youth, but that was long ago, and they had forgotten everything but the streets, and the crowd, and the dust, an impression which was reproduced by the effect of the long drive from Euston Square, which seemed endless, through lines of houses and shops and flaring gaslights. That continuity of dreary inhabitation, those long lines of featureless buildings, of which it is so difficult to distinguish one from another, is the worse aspect of London, and even Lilias, looking breathless

from the window, ready to be astonished at everything, was chilled a little when she found nothing to be astonished at—for the great shops were closed which furnish brightness to an evening drive, and it seemed to the tired women as if they must have travelled half as far through those dreary, half-lighted streets as they had done before over the open country. But with a bright morning, and the sight of the opening leaves between them and the houses opposite, a different mood came. Miss Jean in particular hailed the vegetation as she might have greeted an old friend whose face she had not hoped to see again.

'Just as green as our own trees, and far more forward,' she said, with delight, as she called Lilias next morning.

With the cheering revelation of this green, their minds were fully tuned to see everything in the best light; but it is not necessary to enter into the sight-seeing of the group of rural ladies, all so fresh and unhackneyed, and ready to enjoy. Margaret preserved a dignified composure in all circumstances. She had the feeling that a great deal was expected from her as the head of the family. The excitement which was quite becoming to the others would to her have

seemed unbecoming, and, as a matter of fact, she made out to herself either that she 'remembered perfectly,' or, at least, was 'quite well aware from all she had heard' of the things which impressed her sisters most profoundly. The work she had in hand was far more important than sight-seeing, which, however, she encouraged in her sisters, being anxious that Lilias should get all that over before she was 'seen,' and had become an actual inhabitant of the great world. Margaret had made every arrangement in what she hoped and believed was the most perfectly good style. She spared no expense on this one episode of grandeur and gaiety. All the little savings of Gowanbrae went to swell the purse which she had made up for the occasion. Old Simon, the old family servant, who had seen them all born, gave respectability to the little open carriage which they had for fine days alternatively with the brougham, by condescending to place himself on the box. He was not very nimble, perhaps, in getting up and down, but he was highly respectable, and indeed, in his best 'blacks,' was sometimes mistaken by ignorant people for the head of the party. Simon, though he liked his ladies to know that he was aware it was a con-

descension, in his heart enjoyed his position, and laid up chapters of experience with which to keep respectful audiences in rapt attention both at Murkley and Gowanbrae. He made common cause with Lilias in her eagerness to see everything. When Miss Jean held back, afraid that so much curiosity might seem vulgar, Simon would take it upon himself to interpose.

'You'll excuse me, mem,' he said, 'but Miss Lilias is young, and it's my opinion a young creature can never see too much. We are never seventeen but wance in our lives.'

'Dear me! that is very true, Simon,' Miss Jean would say, and with a little air of reserve, as if she herself knew all about it, would accompany the eager girl, who sometimes called Simon forward to enjoy a warmer sympathy.

'Look, Simon; that armour has been in battle. Knights have fought in it,' Lilias would say, her eyes dancing with excitement, while Miss Jean stood a little apart with that benevolent smile.

Simon examined everything very minutely, and then he said,

'I'm saying naething against the knights, Miss Lilias, for I'm not one that believes in mere stature without sense to guide it; but they must have been awfu' little men. I would like to see

one of those fine fellows on the horses, with half a dozen of them round him,' Simon remarked. Lilias was somewhat indignant at this depreciation of the heroes of the past, yet still was able to smile, for Simon's devotion to the sentries at the Horse Guards was known. He thought at first they were not real, and, when their movements undeceived him, was for a long time disposed to think that they were ingenious pieces of mechanism. 'Thae *men!*' he had said. 'I canna believe it! That's what ye call an occupation for a rational being! Na, na; I canna believe it.' But he would walk all the way from Cadogan Place in the morning before breakfast to see these wonders of the world. And he acknowledged that St. Paul's was grander than St. George's in Edinburgh, which showed he had an impartial mind. 'But, if ye test them by the congregation that worships in them, it is we that will gain the day—and is that not the best beauty of a kirk?' Simon said. These were days when popular sermons and services were unthought of. But this history has no space for the humours of this new exploration of London sights. It would be difficult to say which of the party enjoyed them most: Lilias, all eagerness and frank curiosity,

or Miss Jean, holding back with that protesting smile, asking no question lest she should show an ignorance which did not become her position as the head of the party, or Simon, who never forgot his *rôle* of critic and moralist. But, while they all enjoyed themselves, Miss Margaret sat in her parlour much more seriously engaged. She had everything to contrive and to decide, and Lilias' dress and all the preliminaries of her introduction to settle. For herself, what could be more imposing than her velvet and all that beautiful lace? The only thing that was wanted was a longer train. The countess had been very ready to undertake the presentation, and had asked the party to dinner, and sent them cards for a great reception. She was very amiable, and delighted to see the Miss Murrays in town.

'And as for your little sister, she ought to make a sensation. She ought to be one of the beauties of the season,' the countess said.

'No, no; that is not to be desired for so young a thing. She is just a country girl,' said Miss Margaret, half hoping that the great lady would protest and declare it impossible that a Murray of Murkley should be so described; but the countess, who was but slightly occupied with Lilias, only smiled graciously and shook hands

warmly, as she dismissed her visitors. When they had left her noble mansion, Miss Jean, mild as she was, on this occasion, took upon her to remonstrate.

'You must not speak of Lilias so,' she said. 'If you will think for a moment, she has just a great deal of presence for so young a person, and Lady Lilias' daughter. People are too civil to contradict you. I would not call her just a country girl.'

Margaret gazed at her sister with something of the astonishment which Balaam must have felt on a certain remarkable occasion. 'I would not say but you are right,' the candid woman said.

The Drawing-room was in the beginning of May. Lilias was greatly interested in all the preparations for it. She was put into the hands of a nice old lady who had been a great dancer in her day to be taught her curtseys, which was a proceeding that amused the girl greatly. She persuaded her instructress to talk, and learned with astonished soul a great many things of which she had no idea, but fortunately no harm: which was the merest chance, the sisters having given her over in the utmost confidence to her teacher, not suspicious of anything injuri-

ous that youth could hear from a nice old woman. These lessons were as good as a play to the girl, and sometimes also to the spectators as she practised her *trois obeisances.* To see her sink into the furbelows of her fashionable dress, and recover herself with elastic grace and without a sign of faltering, filled even Margaret with admiring wonder. The elder lady's majestic curtsey was a far more difficult proceeding, but even she condescended to practise it to the delight of Lilias and the admiration of Miss Jean, throned all the time in the biggest chair, and representing Her Majesty.

'I would just bid you kneel down and make you Lady Margaret on the spot, if it was me,' Jean said.

'My dear, you are just a haverel: for it is men that have to kneel down and be made knights of—and you would not have me made a Sir, I hope?' said Margaret, with a laugh.

'I must say,' said Miss Jean, 'that there is injustice in that. Your forefathers have been Sirs far longer than Her Majesty's family has been upon the throne, and why should there be no trace of it left to give pleasure, just because you and me—and Lilias too, more is the pity—were born women?'

'I have yet to learn,' said Miss Margaret, drawing herself up, 'that a title would make any difference to a Murray of Murkley; we are well enough known without that.'

'Oh! but, Margaret, you should be my lady,' cried Lilias, springing up and making curtseys in pure wantonness all round the room. 'Miss is not suitable for you. Mistress would be better, or Madam, but my lady best of all. I think Jean is a wise woman; and if the queen—'

'You are a grand judge of wisdom,' said her sister. 'Jean and you, you might just go in a show together, the female Solomon and the person that explains the oracle; but you will just go to your bed, and take a good rest, for it will be a fatiguing day to-morrow. You will have plenty to do, looking after your dress, and remembering your manners, without taking it upon you to give your advice to Her Majesty, who has been longer at the trade than you.'

'To-morrow!—is it really to-morrow? Oh!' cried Lilias, 'when I come before her I will forget everything: and what will she say to me?' This made the elder sister look a little confused, but she had herself but little idea what the royal lady would do in the circumstances; and the safest plan was to send Lilias to bed.

Next morning it was a sight to see the two *débutantes.* Miss Margaret had a train of velvet sweeping from her shoulders that made her look, Lilias declared, like Margaret of Anjou, though why this special resemblance was hit upon, the young lady declined to say. As for herself, in clouds of virgin white, it seemed to her sisters that nothing had ever been seen so lovely as this little lily, who would, however, have been more aptly termed a rose, with the colour of excitement coming and going upon her cheeks, her eyes like dew with the sun on it, her dazzling sweetness of complexion. Perhaps her features were not irreproachable, perhaps her little figure wanted filling out; but at seventeen these are faults that lean to virtue's side. She was dazzling to behold in that first exquisite youthful bloom, which is like nothing else in the world. When she came into the room where they were awaiting her, she made them a curtsey to show her perfection, her face running over with smiles. And then Lilias grew grave, a flutter came to her child's heart. Her eyes grew serious with the awe of a neophyte on the edge of the mysteries of life.

'When I come back I will be a woman,' she said, with a little catch of her breath.

'No, no, not till you are one-and-twenty, my darling,' cried Jean, who did not always know when to hold her peace.

'I shall be a woman,' Lilias repeated. 'I shall be introduced to the world—I shall be able to go where I please——'

'There may be two words about that,' said Margaret, interfering; 'but this is not a time for discoursing. So just you gather up your train, Lilias, and let us go away.'

Miss Jean went downstairs after them; she watched them drive away, waving her hand. She thought Margaret was just beautiful notwithstanding her age. 'But, after all, forty is not such an extraordinary age,' Jean said to herself; and, as for Lilias, words could not express what her sister felt. The Court must be splendid indeed, and a great deal of beauty in it, if two ladies like that were not observed. She took out her table-cover, which had been much neglected, and sat down at the window and arranged her silks as of old. There was no carnation now for a pattern, but indeed she was done with that flower. When a woman has seen her best-beloved go forth in full panoply to conquer, and feels the domestic silence close down upon herself, there

is, if she is the kind of woman, an exquisite repose and pleasure in it. The mother, who comes out to the door to watch her gay party go away, and, closing it again with all their pleasure in her mind, goes back to the quiet, either to work for them or to wait for them, has her share both real and vicarious, and doubles the pleasure. She goes with them along the way, she broods over their happiness at home. Miss Jean, who was this kind of woman, had thus a double share, and worked into her flowers the serene and delicious calm, the soft expectation, the flutter of an excitement out of which everything harsh was gone. She could not help thinking that it would be a real pleasure to Her Majesty, who had girls of her own and a kind heart, to see such a creature as Lilias just in the opening of her flower. The Queen would be glad to know that General Murray had left such representatives, though, no doubt, she would be sorry there was no son. Jean felt too, modestly, that it was always possible, seeing Margaret and Lilias, and admiring them as she must, that Her Majesty might graciously ask whether there was no more of a family, and command that 'next time' the other sister should be brought to see her. 'But, oh, she would be disappointed in me!'

Miss Jean said to herself. All these thoughts kept her amused and happy, so that she wanted no other entertainment. She even forgot Lewis and the confidence which had so touched her heart. She thought it so likely that some young duke, some glorious lord in waiting, would clasp his hands together and say, in the very presence chamber, 'Here, by God's word, is the one maid for me.' Lewis had floated from her mind, which was beguiled by higher things.

When the carriage drove back to the door, she rushed downstairs to meet the victorious pair. Lilias was the first to appear, a little crushed and faded, like a rose that has been bound into a bouquet and suffered from the pressure: but that did not matter, for everybody knows there is a great crowd. But the face was not radiant as it had been, Miss Jean could not but perceive. There was a great deal of gravity in it. The corners of the mouth were slightly, very slightly turned the wrong way. She came in quite seriously, calmed out of all her excitement. Margaret followed with the same serious air.

'Well, my darling!' Jean cried, running forward to meet the girl.

'Oh, it has all passed very well,' Margaret said over Lilias' head.

Jean drew them into the little dining-room, which was on the ground floor, to hear everything.

'And were the dresses beautiful, and the jewels? and was Her Majesty looking well? and what did she say to you?' cried the eager spectator.

'You will just make Lilias take some wine, for the child is like to drop with tiredness; and as for me, before I say a syllable, I must get rid of this train, for it weighs me to the earth,' said Margaret.

'My darling,' cried Jean, throwing her arms about Lilias, 'something has happened!'

Upon which Lilias burst into a laugh, which, compared with the extreme gravity of her face, had a somewhat rueful effect. It was a laugh which was not mirthful and spontanéous as the laughter of Lilias generally was, but produced itself of a sudden as by some quick impulse of ridicule.

'No,' she said, 'Jean, that is just the thing, nothing has happened;' and then the rueful look melted away, and a gleam of real fun came back.

'Dear me! dear me! something has gone wrong. You never got to the drawing-room at all?'

'Oh yes,' cried the girl, 'and all went off very well, didn't you hear Margaret say?'

'Well, then, my dear, I don't understand,' Jean said, puzzled.

'It is just that that was all,' said Lilias, with her laugh. 'It all went off very well. Everything was quite right, I suppose. Me that thought it was the great, beautiful court itself, and that we would see everybody, and that it would be known who you were, and everything! I said to Margaret, "Is that all?" And I think she was quite as astonished as me, for she said, "I suppose so." And then we waited, and at last we got the carriage, and we came away! Now that I think of it, it was *awfully* funny,' said Lilias, with tears, which were no doubt tears of merriment, but which were also tears of vexation, in her eyes. 'To think we should have thought of it for months and months, and got such dresses, and played such pranks with Madame Ballerina—all for that!'

'But, my dear,' said Miss Jean, always consolatory, 'it is not only for that, it is for everything. It is just the beginning, you know.

You will see better society, and you will be asked to more places, and, if ever you go abroad, they say it is such an advantage, and—— Besides, my darling, it is your duty to your sovereign,' Miss Jean added, with a little solemnity.

Upon this Lilias laughed more and more.

'Oh,' she cried, 'that is just the thing, Jean! I saw my sovereign yawn. I am sure she did. I was so astonished. I noticed everything, but the queen saw nothing to be surprised at, she has gone over it so often. I am sure I saw her yawn, though she concealed it. Could there nothing be invented,' cried Lilias, with a liveliness in which there was a sparkle of annoyance and passion, 'that would be better than that? And this was what we came to town for,' she said, sitting down upon her pretty train and her flowers, which were all tumbled. The laugh went out of her face. 'It is so funny,' Lilias said, as grave as a judge, 'when you think upon it; so little, and yet so much.'

'And did Her Majesty say nothing then about papa? She would not know it was you, that must have been how it was. There are many Murrays, you know. You will see the name even over shops. And never asked where you were

staying, or said that she would see you again—?'

'Jean,' said Miss Margaret, appearing suddenly in a dressing-gown, 'what nonsense is that you are talking? Did anybody ever suppose that the queen was to make remarks, and ask questions, with crowds of women in their best gowns just ready to eat you to get past? It all went off very well,' she said, seating herself on the sofa. 'Lilias, I just cannot bide to see you at this hour of the day in that ridiculous dress. I've taken off mine, and thankful to get rid of it. A girl of your age can stand a great deal, but you are far nicer, to my opinion, in your natural clothes. As I was saying, it went off just extremely well. We got through really without so much crushing as I expected, and the dresses were beautiful, and diamonds enough to make the sun think shame of himself. No doubt it is just a little ridiculous, as Lilias says, to see the ladies in all their finery in the daylight; but then it is the custom. You can put up with anything when you know it is the custom. People like us, that just go once in a way, we never get into the way of it; but for those that go often, you know, they just never mind. And of course it was a beautiful sight.'

'It must have been that,' cried Jean, seizing

hold upon this certainty; 'you will call it to mind, Lilias, when it's long past, and it will always be a pleasure to think of. It must have been a wonderful sight.'

'As for expecting,' continued Margaret, 'that it would be an occasion for rational intercourse, or anything like making acquaintance either with the Court or Her Majesty, I could have told you from the beginning that was nonsense. Just think of such crowds of women, one at the back of another, like birds in a net. It would be out of the question to think of it. Now, Lilias, go and get your things off, and, if you are tired, you can lie down a little——'

'Yes, my dear, you must just lie down a little—it will do you good.'

'Jean and Margaret,' cried Lilias, jumping up, 'do you think I am old, like you? What am I to lie down for?—and besides, you never lie down, that are old. It is only me you say that to. I will go and take my things off, and then I will take Susan and go out, and look in at all the vulgar shops, and see the common folk, for I think I like them best.'

'I am afraid, Margaret, the poor child is disappointed,' said Jean, when Lilias had gone away.

'It will be because you have been putting things into her head, then,' said Margaret; 'everything went off just as well as possible. You are surely later than usual with the tea? My back is just broken with that train. It is really as warm as a summer day, and to go dragging about miles of velvet after you is something terrible. She made her reverence as well as you could have desired, and looked just as bonnie. I cannot say as much for Lady Ida, though she is nice enough; and oh, but that dress is dreadful for women that have lost their figures, and are just mountains of flesh, like so many of these English ladies. When I see them, I am just thankful I never married. Husband and bairns are dear bought at that cost. Where are you going? Now, Jean, just sit and listen to me, and give me my cup of tea. There is Susan to take care of Lilias.'

'But if the poor thing is disappointed, Margaret? I am sure, for my part, I expected——'

'And if you expected nonsense, will that do Lilias any good to let her see it?' cried Margaret, testily. 'When she comes to herself, she will see that we have all been fools, and those that have the most sense will say nothing about it. That is the part I am intending to take. When

you think of it, there could be nothing more ridiculous. When you speak to Lilias, you must just laugh at her. You must say that a drawing-room means nothing—it is just a formality. It means that you have come into the world, and that you are of the class of people that are beholden to pay their duty to the queen. That is all it means. I cannot tell,' said Margaret, with irritation, 'what other ridiculous idea the child has got into her head, or who put it there. Will you give me my cup of tea?'

Lilias came down after awhile in her ordinary dress, and with a countenance divided between mirth and melancholy.

'I thought I should feel a different person,' she said, 'but I am just the same. I thought the world was going to be changed, but there is no difference. All the same, I am a woman. I never can be sent back to the school-room, and made to refuse parties, and stay at home, and give up all the fun now.'

'All the fun is a vulgar expression,' said Margaret. 'It is just to take you to parties and give you pleasure that we have come here.'

'Ah, but there is more than that. I am not going to be taken, but to go. I am grown up now. It is curious,' said Lilias, with a reflective

air, 'how you understand things just by doing them. I was thinking of something else; I was not thinking of this; and, of course, it turns out to be the most important. All this time I have been your child, yours and Jean's—now I am just *me*.'

'So long as you do not carry it too far, my dear.'

'I will carry it just as far as I can go,' cried Lilias, with a laugh. She rejected the tea, out of which Margaret was getting much comfort, and ran upstairs again, where they could hear her at the piano, playing over everything she knew, which was not very much. The sound and measure were a little ease to her excitement. By-and-by Miss Jean was allowed by Margaret to get free, and, going upstairs, found Lilias standing with her forehead pressed against the window, looking out. There was not very much to see—the upper windows opposite across the light green foliage, a few carriages passing under the windows. When she heard some one coming into the room behind her, the girl broke forth suddenly.

'What are we here for in this strange place? I don't want to go to parties; they will just be like seeing the Queen. What has that to do

with us? We may fancy we are great people, but we are only little small people, and nobody ever heard of us before.'

'Lilias, my love,' said Jean, with her arms round her little sister, 'you must not say that.'

'Why shouldn't I say it, when it is true? To see all these grand ladies, and none of them knew us. Oh, yes, Margaret had known them —two or three—but they had forgotten her, and she only remembered them when she heard their names. But when we are at home everybody knows us. What is the use of pretending that we are great people like these? When we are at home we are great enough—as great as I want to be.'

'Your nerves are just a little upset, my darling, and you are disappointed (and little wonder).'

'I am not disappointed—that is, I can see it was foolish all through; and I have no nerves; but I have made a fool of myself, and I could kill myself,' cried Lilias; 'and everybody——'

'Whisht! whisht! my bonnie dear. Put on your hat, and we will go out. Margaret is resting, and I have got some little things to do.'

After a while this simple prospect delivered Lilias out of her trouble; to walk about in the air and sunshine, to see the other people, so

many of them, going about their business, to watch the movement of the living world, even to go into the shops and buy 'little things' here and there, a bit of ribbon in one, some gloves in another, a pretty bit of china Miss Jean had set her heart on, was enough to restore her to her usual light-heartedness. Nothing very tragical had happened, after all.

CHAPTER III.

IT was after this that the experiences in society began. The countess gave them a dinner, which was very kind and friendly, and at which they met various country friends. Indeed it was an entertainment which had a whiff of the country about it altogether, a sort of rural air; some of the gentlemen who were posted here and there about the table to talk the talk of the clubs and give the other *convives* a sense of being in London, got together after the meal was over and talked in the doorway between the two drawing-rooms with mutual commiseration.

'I suppose all this is on account of Bellendean,' they said. Bellendean was her ladyship's son, and was intended to stand for the county on the next opportunity. 'It is like the Georgics,' these gentlemen said. 'It is like running down into the country.'

'The country!' said another, 'where could you find any country like that? Not within five hundred miles.'

The countess smiled upon this pair as she passed among her guests, and said, very low, 'Talk to them—you are not doing your duty.' Thegentlemen from the clubs followed her with mute looks of despair. In this way a great lady does her devoir to her county without much hardship. At least, three of the more important guests believed the party to be made for them, and were surprised, and even a little more than surprised to find themselves among their country neighbours. 'Who would have thought of seeing you?' they said to each other. To Lilias it was delightful to find these old friends. She sympathised in the countess's very effusive regret at Bellendean's absence. 'How sorry he will be,' his mother said. Bellendean was believed to be engaged to Lady Ida, his plain relation. He was very good about it, and did his duty manfully; but to have put a pretty little creature like that in his way would have been madness, his mother felt. So that she entertained her rural neighbours alone, with the aid of the gentlemen from the clubs, who were all quite safe from bread and butter beauties,

though they admired her complexion and said to each other, 'Jove! where does the girl get her bloom from?'

'It does not come out of Bond Street,' said the countess.

Miss Margaret was very stately in this party. She saw through it, and was indignant with Jean and Lilias for enjoying themselves. Two or three engagements sprang out of it, very pleasant, but somewhat humiliating to the head of the family, who had come to London in order to be beyond the country, and give Lilias experience of the great world. There were two or three little dinners, one in a hotel, and the others in other lodgings of similar character to those in Cadogan Place, and many proposals that they should go to the play together, and to the Royal Academy to see the pictures, proposals which it was all Margaret could do to prevent the others from accepting. She gave a couple of little parties herself to the rural notables. But all these did not count, they only kept her out of society, in the true sense of the word. Margaret was as proud a woman as ever bore a Scottish name, which is saying much; but it seemed to her that she would almost have stooped to a meanness to gain an entry into the upper

world which she felt to be circling just out of her reach, and from which now and then she heard echoes dropping into the lower spheres. It was not for herself she desired that entry. An almost wrathful contempt grew upon her as she heard the chatter of society, the evil tales, the coterie gossip, the inane vulgarities which, to a visionary from the country expecting great things, made the first impression of town in many cases the most distressful of disappointments. For herself, she longed for the serene quiet which, if it was sometimes dull, was at least always innocent, and where the routine of every day contented the harmless mind. Here an uneasy discontent, an ambition which she felt humiliating, a constant strain of anxiety which was mean and contemptible, filled her being. She wanted to know people who had no claim upon human approbation but that of knowing a great many other people and giving parties. She was unhappy because she was not acquainted with ladies in the fashionable world, and men who went everywhere. When Jean and Lilias, seated upon chairs by her side looking on at the passing crowds of Vanity Fair in Rotten Row with all the delight of people from the country, saw and hailed and exchanged joy-

ous greetings with other people from the country passing by, Margaret's soul was filled with irritation and annoyance. These were not the acquaintances she desired. It vexed her to be exposed to their cordiality, their pleasure at sight of anybody they knew. Jean too was delighted to perceive in the crowd what she called 'a kent face;' but Margaret's heart was wrung with envy, with unsatisfied wishes, and with a profound contempt for herself which underlay all these. She took the greatest trouble, however, to find out people of any pretensions to fashion whom she had ever known, to recall herself to their recollection, she who at home considered it her due to be courted and sought out by others. While she sat in the crowd and listened to the strangers about her talking over their amusements, her heart burned within her. 'I saw you at Lady Dynevor's last night. Did you ever see such a crowd! As for dancing, it was out of the question,' or 'Are you going to the duchess's concert to-morrow? Mamma has promised to go if we can get away soon enough from the Esmonds', where we dine,' or 'We have promised just to look in at the French Ambassador's after the opera.' She felt the muscles of her face elongate, and a watering in her

mouth. She looked at these favoured ones with wistful eyes. She did not form any illusive vision to herself of the charm of society, or suppose it to be eloquent and brilliant and delightful, but she wanted to be in it, in the swing, as the slang expression was, not merely making little parties with friends from the country, fraternising with known faces, going to the theatres and the sights. These were not Margaret's object; her heart sank as she saw the weeks passing, and felt herself to make no advance.

The countess's dinner had been a disappointment—almost, in the excited state of Margaret's feelings, had seemed an insult; but there was the greater gathering in prospect, the reception, at which all society was expected to be present, and to which she looked forward with a half hope that this might realise some of her expectations, yet a half certainty of further disappointment and offence. Lilias had got a new dress for the occasion, to her own surprise and almost dissatisfaction, for she was somewhat alarmed by Margaret's bounties; and Jean, though not without a little tremor lest the countess should recollect that she had worn it at Mrs. Stormont's ball, and indeed on several other occasions, put on her grey satin. Mar-

garet was in black silk, very imposing and stately, with her beautiful lace. The three sisters were a fine sight as their hostess came forward to greet them at the door of the beautiful rooms, one within another, which, what with mirrors and a profusion of lights, seemed to prolong themselves into indefinite distance. The rooms were not very full as yet, for the ladies had come somewhat early, and the countess was very gracious to them. She admired Lilias, and kissed her on the cheek, and told Jean, who beamed, and Margaret, who was not quite sure that she was not offended, that their little sister was a credit to the North.

'If you keep in this room, you will hear who the people are as they come in,' she said, with an easy assumption of the fact that they knew nobody.

They took their places accordingly at a little distance, the two elder ladies seating themselves until they were almost buried by the crowds that streamed in and stood all about them in lively groups, standing over them, talking across their shoulders as if they were objects in still life, till Miss Margaret rose indignantly and formed a little group of her own with Jean, who was a little bewildered, and Lilias, who eyed the talkers round her, half frightened, half

wistful, with a great longing to have some one to talk with too.

'We may as well go into the next room,' said Margaret; 'there will perhaps be some more rational conversation going on there;' for it is impossible to describe how impatient she was growing of the duchess's concert, and dear Lady Grandmaison's Saturdays, and all the other places in which these fine people met each other daily or nightly. 'To hear who they are,' said Margaret, 'might be worth our while, if they were persons that had ever been heard of; but when it is just Lady Tradgett, and Sir Gilbert Fairoaks, and the Misses This or That, it is not overmuch to edification.'

'And you cannot easily fit the folk to their names,' said Miss Jean.

'They are just as little attractive as their names are,' said Miss Margaret; 'and what does it matter, when it is a name that no mortal has ever heard tell of, whether it has Lady to it or Sir to it?—or Duke even, for that matter; but dukes are mostly historical titles, which is always something.'

'But it is a beautiful sight,' said Miss Jean, 'though it would be more pleasant if we knew more people.'

'I cannot think,' said Margaret, with a little bitterness, 'that we would be much made up with the acquaintance of the people here. So far as I can jüdge, it is just the rabble of society that comes to these big gatherings. It is just a sight, like going to the play.'

'There is Lady Ida,' said Lilias. 'I hope she will come and speak to us. But I would rather go to the play, if it is only a sight.'

'Oh, my dear, it is just beautiful,' said Miss Jean. 'Look at the flowers. The cost of them must have been a fortune—and all those grand mirrors reflecting them till you think every rose is double. And the diamonds, Lilias! There is an old lady there that is just like a lamp of light! and many beautiful persons too, which is still finer,' Miss Jean added, casting a tender glance upon the little figure by her side, which she thought the most beautiful of all.

'Oh, Miss Murray, I am so glad to see you,' said Lady Ida. 'We were afraid you must have been caught by some other engagement; for no one minds throwing over an evening invitation. Yes, there are a great many people. My aunt knows everybody, I think. It is a bore keeping up such a large acquaintance, but people always come, for they are sure of meeting everybody they know.'

'But that is not our case, for we are strangers—' began Miss Jean, thinking to mend matters.

Her sister silenced her by a look, which made that well-intentioned woman tremble.

'Being so seldom in town,' she said, 'it is not my wish to keep up an indiscriminate acquaintance. In the country you must know everybody, but in a place like London you can pick and choose.'

This sentence was too long for Lady Ida, whose attention wandered.

'How do you do?' she said, nodding and smiling over Lilias' shoulder. 'Ah, yes, to be sure, that is quite true. I suppose you are going to take Lilias to the ball everybody is talking of—oh, *the* ball, the Greek ambassador's?'

'Dear me, you have never heard of it, Margaret!' Miss Jean said.

'Oh, you must go! Lilias, you must insist upon going,' Lady Ida cried, her eyes going beyond them to some new comers who hurried forward with effusive greetings. 'You have got your tickets?' were the first words she addressed to them.

'Oh, so many thanks,' said the new people. 'We got them this morning. And I hear everybody is going. How kind of you to take so much trouble for us.'

Miss Margaret, somewhat grimly, had moved away. Envy, and desire, and profound mortification were in her soul.

'If you cannot speak to the purpose, you might at least hold your tongue,' she said to Jean, with unwonted bitterness.

Lilias followed them forlorn. She was dazzling in her young bloom. She was prettily dressed. Her sweet, wistful looks, a little scared and wondering, afraid of the crowd, which laughed and talked, and babbled about its pleasures, and took no notice of her, were enough to have touched any tender heart. And no doubt there were a number of sympathetic people about to whom Margaret and Jean would have been much more interesting than the majority ef the chatterers, and who would have admired and flattered Lilias with the utmost delight. But there was nobody to bring them together. Lady Ida, in the midst of a crowd of her friends, was discussing in high excitement this great event in the fashionable world. The other people were meeting each other daily in one place or another. Our poor country friends, after the brave front they had put upon it at first, and their pretence of enjoying the beautiful sight—the flowers, the lights, the

diamonds, the pretty people—began to feel it all insupportable. After a while, by tacit consent, they moved back towards the door.

'But the carriage will not be here for an hour yet, Margaret,' Jean said.

'Then we will wait for it in the hall,' said Margaret, sternly.

'Are you really going away so soon?' cried the countess, shaking hands with them. 'I know! you are going to Lady Broadway's, you naughty people. But of course you want to make the best of your time, and show Lilias everything.'

It was on Jean's lips to say, in her innocence, Oh no, they knew nothing about Lady Broadway: but fortunately she restrained herself. They drove home very silently, no one feeling disposed to speak, and when they reached the stillness of Cadogan Place, where they were not expected for an hour or two, and where no lamp was lighted, but only a pair of glimmering candles upon the mantel-piece, Miss Margaret closed the door, sending old Simon peremptorily away, and made a little address to her sisters.

'It appears,' she says, 'that I have been mistaken, Lilias. I thought the name of Murray of Murkley was well enough known to have opened

all the best houses to us wherever we went, and I thought we had old friends enough to make society pleasant; but you perceive that I have been mistaken. I would have concealed it from myself, if I could, and I would have done anything to conceal it from you. But that is not possible after to-night. My heart is just broken to have raised your hopes, and then to disappoint them like this. But you see everything is changed. Our old friends are dead, or out of the way, and it's clear to me that those fashionable people, that are just living in a racket night and day, have no thought for any mortal but just themselves and their own kind. So there is nothing for it but to confess to you, Lilias, that I have just made a mistake, and proved how ignorant I am of the world.'

'Oh! Margaret, not that—it is just the world that is unworthy of you,' cried Jean, whom her sister put down with an impatient wave of her hand.

And now it was that Lilias showed her sense, as was often remarked afterwards. She gave her little skip in the air, and said, with a laugh,

'What am I caring, Margaret? Ida was never very nice. She might have introduced the people to us. If it had been a dance, it

would have been dreadful to stand and see the rest enjoying themselves; but when it was nothing but talk, talk, what do I care?'

'It was a beautiful sight,' said Jean, taking courage. 'I am very glad to have seen it, though I had never spoken to any person. And we were not so bad as that. There was the countess and Lady Ida, and that old gentleman who trod upon my train, and that was very civil, besides——'

'Besides that we did not want them a bit, for there are three of us, and what do we care?' cried Lilias, throwing her arms round Margaret, who had dropped, overcome by disappointment and fatigue, into a chair.

Thus there was a little scene of mutual tenderness and drawing together after the trial of the evening, and Margaret retired to her room with a relieved heart, though she had felt an hour or two before as if, after having made her confession, she must drop the helm of the family for ever and slip into a secondary place. No one, however, seemed to see it in this light. Lilias and Jean had vied with each other in professions of enjoyment. They liked the Row, they liked the park, they liked going to the shops, and to see the play. If Margaret would not

make herself unhappy about it, they would be quite content without society. They soothed her so much that she gave the helm a vigorous push before she went to rest that very night; for even while the others were speaking, and protesting their indifference to all the delights of the fashionable world, her thoughts had leapt away from them to speculate whether, after all, it might not be possible to show the countess and Lady Ida that their good offices were not necessary, and that without them Margaret Murray in her own person had credit enough to get tickets enough for the great ball. She said to herself that her cards were not played out yet, that she still had something in her power.

Lilias, for her part, was half disposed to cry after her demonstration of pride and high spirits. As Jean helped to undress her, which she loved to do when she had the chance, the girl changed her tone.

'What is the use of all my pretty things, if we go nowhere?' she said. 'Oh, I should like one ball, just to say I have been at a real ball in London. It would be dreadful to go back again, and, when Katie comes asking how many dances we were at, to say not one. Oh!' cried Lilias, clasping her hands, 'I will tell fibs, I

know I will, for it would be terrible to confess that.'

'My darling!' cried Miss Jean. 'Oh, I wish there was any way to get you asked to this grand one that all yon people were talking about. I am sure I would give a little finger if that would do any good.'

'But your little finger would do no good,' said Lilias, ruefully. 'I see now that you never asked that fairy to my christening, as you ought to have done: and she has never forgiven it. But never mind, I must just tell Katie a good big one, for I will not have her pitying me. If it is a little bigger than a fib, it will only be a *lee*, and that is not so dreadful, after all.'

'You must not tell even a fib, my darling—it is never right.'

'No, it is never right,' said Lilias, with a comical look, kissing her sister, who was now busy, smoothing out and folding, the creamy, foamy white draperies in which Lilias had stood about the countess's rooms, not unremarked, though unfriended. What was the use of all these pretty things if they went nowhere? Miss Jean's thoughts were busy with the same problem that occupied her elder sister. It was too impossible to be considered a hope;

but if she herself—she who was always the second and far inferior in every way to Margaret—if only she could find some way!

Thus those wonderful prognostications of glory and success with which Miss Margaret had persuaded Lilias to give up the little dissipations of the country, and in which she herself had entertained a faith so calm and assured, came to nothing. Lilias, though in Margaret's presence she took it so nobly, had a great many thoughts upon the subject after she had smiled sleepily and received Miss Jean's good night as if from the very borders of sleep. When Jean went out of the room on tiptoe, Lilias woke up and began to think. She looked down from those heights of experience on which she at present stood, upon herself in the happy vale of her ignorance in Murkley, with a little envy, yet a great deal of contempt. What a little silly thing she had been, expecting to go to Court in the way people write of in books, and to be one of the fine company about the Queen! Lilias reflected with amazement, and even with an amusement which was more droll than pleasant, that had it been suggested to her that she would certainly be invited to Windsor Castle, she would have accepted the incident as quite probable. Margaret had even

spoken of the post of maid-of-honour. Lilias laughed a small laugh to herself in the dusk. She had believed it all, it had seemed to her quite natural; but never—never could she be such a simpleton again. One may be silly once, but when enlightenment of this sort comes, she said to herself, it is for ever! never—never could she be deceived again. And then gulping down something in her throat, and drying her eyes hurriedly under cover of the dark, she declared to herself that it was far better to know, and that even the pain of it was better than the credulous foolishness with which she had taken everything in. In any case it was best to know. If Margaret had made such a mistake, it was not much wonder that she, Lilias, should have been deceived. Lilias recalled Lady Ida's look over her shoulder, the warmth of her greeting to the people who had got the tickets, who were in the world, and felt once more a sensation of hot resentment and indignation darting over her. And yet, perhaps, even that was not so bad as it seemed. When Katie Seton was taken by her mother to the county balls, the great ladies, even Margaret herself, would not encourage the intrusion. To be sure, Katie could not be left standing unnoticed, for she knew everybody

just as well as Lady Ida did. But London was very different. London was the world, and it was evident that it was not Lilias' sphere. She saw all the foolishness of the idea as she lay thinking, throwing off the coverings and back the curtains to get as much air as possible in the little, close, London room. She said to herself: Oh! for Murkley, where there was always air enough and to spare, and wide, peaceful horizons, and unfathomable skies, and people who had known her from her cradle. That was far better than standing smiling at nothing and trying to look as if she liked it, among hordes and hordes of unknown people who stared but never took any trouble to be kind to the strangers. 'If I were them,' cried Lilias, regardless of possibilities, 'and saw strangers standing that knew nobody, it would be there I would go! I would not just stare and think it was not my business. I would make it my business!' She remembered so many ladies who looked as if they must be *nice*, and girls like herself surrounded with acquaintances and admirers. 'Oh!' Lilias cried to herself, her eyes flashing in the dark, 'if it had been me!' She would not have let another girl stand forlorn while she was enjoying herself. And Margaret and Jean,

whom everybody could see were so far above the common! Perhaps it was because they were English—she said to herself, almost with a pleasant flash of enlightenment—that they were so little kind. But, then, the countess was not English. It was London that made them heartless, that made them think of no one but themselves: at home it could not be so. Then Lilias assured herself once more with lofty philosophy that, though it might not be very pleasant, it was well to have found out at once, so that there might be no further question about it, what a stranger had to expect in the world. No such thing could ever happen at home. The thing for herself and her sisters to do was to turn their backs upon this heartless society, indignant, dignified, valuing it as it deserved, and return to their native scenes, where everybody honoured them, where they were courted when they appeared, and regretted when they went away. The worst wish that Lilias could form was that some of these same young ladies whose looks she could remember anywhere, she thought, should appear in the country, knowing nobody: and then what a gracious revenge the Murrays would take! Margaret would not even wait for an introduction, she would let nobody stand there forlorn

in the crowd, and Lilias herself, proudly magnanimous, would prefer them to all the little attentions which on Tayside could never fail. This thought gave a warmer desire to the longing of her disappointment to get home.

But, as she was going to sleep, lulled by this anticipation, two regrets sprang up within her mind, retarding for at least five minutes each her slumbers—one was the thought what a pity to have so many pretty things and never to go anywhere where they could be worn; the other was a keen, acute, stinging realisation of Katie, and the many questions that little woman of the world would ask her. 'How many balls were you at?' Lilias almost skipped out of bed in her impatience. 'But I will not own to it. I will tell her a fib rather. I will almost tell her a *lee*,' Lilias cried to herself. A *lee* was perhaps worse than a fib; but it was not supposed to be so harsh a thing as a lie—at least, upon Tayside.

CHAPTER IV.

NEXT morning some further incidents occurred which disturbed Margaret, just recovering from the discomfiture of the preceding night, and plunged her into fresh anxiety. It was Jean that was the cause of one of these as of so many of her annoyances since they came to town—Jean, who could not contain her pleasure when amid all these crowds of unknown people she saw 'a kent face.' She had got so much into the way of doing this, and was so delighted with everybody that looked like home, ministers with their wives who had come up for a holiday after the Assembly, and little lairds, and professional persons of all classes, that, when it was possible, her sister had contrived to leave Jean at home when they went into the Row for their usual walk. But on this occasion it had not been possible to do so, and scarcely were they seated under their favourite tree, when Margaret with dismay heard the usual explosion.

'Oh! Lilias, just look—it is certainly him; though I never would have thought of seeing him here.'

'Whom do you mean by *him?*' said Margaret. 'And for goodness sake, Jean, where everybody is hearing you, do not exclaim like that. You will just be taken for an ignorant person that knows nobody.'

'And I'm sure they would not be far wrong that thought so,' said Jean. 'Yes, I was sure it was him: and glad, glad he will be to see us, for he seems not to have a creature to speak to. Dear me, Philip,' she said, rising and stretching out her hand through a startled group who separated to let the friends approach each other, 'who would have thought of seeing you here!'

Philip Stormont's face lighted up.

'I was looking for you,' he said, in his laconic way. He had been strolling along with a vague stare, looking doubly rustic and home-spun and out of place; he had the very same cane in his hand with the knob that he used to suck at Murkley. 'I knew you were here, and I was looking for you,' he said.

'And have you just arrived, and straight from Tayside? and how is your good mother and all our friends?'

'My mother is away: and I've been away for the last three months,' said Philip; 'I've been out in the Mediterranean. There was little doing at home, and she was keen for me to go.'

'And now I suppose you have come to London to go into all the gaieties here?' said Margaret, for the first time taking her part in the conversation. She looked somewhat grimly at the long-leggit lad. He was brown from his sea-voyaging, and too roughly clad for these fashionable precincts. 'This is just the height of the season, and you'll no doubt intend to turn yourself into a butterfly, like the rest of the young men.'

'I am not very like a butterfly now,' said Philip, suddenly awakened to the imperfections of his dress.

'Oh! but that is soon mended,' said Miss Jean, always kind; 'you will have to go to your tailor, and you will soon be as fine as anybody.'

Philip grew fiery red with sudden shame and dismay. He cast a glance at Lilias, and read the same truth in her eyes. Except Jean, who had first found him out, nobody was very glad to see him in his sea-going tweeds. It had not struck him before. He muttered something about making himself decent, and left them

hurriedly, striding along out of sight under the trees. Miss Margaret smiled as he disappeared.

'Well,' she said, drawing a long breath, 'that is a good riddance; and I wish the rest of our country friends were got rid of as easy. I think you might remember, Jean, that to entertain the like of Philip Stormont is not what we came to London for.'

Jean was magnanimous. She had it on her lips to say something of the failure so far of their expedition to London, but it died away before it was spoken. As for Margaret, she had forgotten the downfall of last night. Her mind was labouring with schemes for advancement. All her faculties were nerved to the struggle. But, alas! what are faculties when it is friends you want? To repulse Philip was a matter of instinct; but to open the doors of the great houses was another affair. And, even when that was done, all was not done; for what would be the good of taking Lilias to a great ball unless there was some prospect of getting her partners when she was there? Margaret had determined that she would accomplish both—but how? To see a worthy human being struggling in the face of difficulties is a great sight, especially when he (or she) struggles not for himself, but for those he loves. Nothing can

be more entirely true, or indeed more completely a truism; but when the difficulties are those of getting an invitation to a ball, and, when there, partners for your charge, the world may laugh, but the struggle is no less arduous. A mother in such a case gets contempt, if not reproach, instead of any just appreciation; but a sister may perhaps secure a gentler verdict. Such love was in the object, if it was not otherwise very worthy; and if there was much pride too, it was of so natural a kind. She shook off Philip as she would have shaken off a thorn that clung to her dress; but still he was another element of discomfort. She wanted no long-leggit lad to attach himself to her party, and less now than ever—for who could tell what effect the contrast between the indifference of the world and the devotion of her old playfellow might have upon Lilias if once, she said to herself, he was out of those ridiculous tweeds, which he ought to have known better than to appear in. Margaret made the signal to her party to rise from their chairs after this little incident. She had a suspicion that the people about were smiling at the encounter with the rustic. But indeed the people about were concerned with themselves, and paying little attention to the

ladies from the country. Everybody knew them to be ladies from the country, which of itself was an irritating circumstance enough.

They got up accordingly with great docility and joined the stream of people moving up and down. And now it was that another encounter, more alarming and unexpected still, brought her heart to Margaret's mouth, and moved both the others in different ways with sudden excitement. As they moved along with the tide on one hand, the other stream coming the other way, an indiscriminate mass, in which there were so few faces that had any interest for them, suddenly, without warning, wavered, opened, and disclosed a well-known countenance, all lighted up with animation and eagerness. There was no imperfection of appearance in the case of this young man. He was walking with two or three others, and there was in his eyes nothing of that forlorn gaze in search of acquaintances which distinguished the rural visitor. He had been, perhaps, too dainty for Murkley, but he was in his element here. He came up to the three ladies, taking off his hat with that unusual demonstration of respect which had amused them amid the less elaborate salutations of the country. His appearance froze the blood in Mar-

garet's veins. She felt that no compromise was possible, that her action must be stern and decisive. She turned and gave Lilias a peremptory look, then made Lewis such a curtsey as filled all the spectators with awe. She even dropped her hand by her side and caught hold of the draperies of Lilias to ensure that the girl followed her. Lilias had almost given her little skip in the air for pure pleasure at the sight of him, when she received that look and secret tug, more imperative still. She put out her hand as she was swept past with an 'Oh, Mr. Murray!' which was half a protest: but she was too much astonished to resist Margaret. Jean, left behind, in her surprise and delight, greeted the stranger with a tremulous cry.

'Oh, but I am glad to see you!' she said.

But, when she saw that Margaret had swept on, she made an agitated pause. Lewis took her hand almost with gentle violence.

'You must speak to her—you have always been my friend,' he said.

'Oh, yes, Mr. Murray, I am your friend,' said Miss Jean, following with her eyes the two figures that were disappearing in the crowd; 'but what am I to do if I lose Margaret?'

Her perplexity and distress would have amused a less tender observer.

'We will go after them,' he said, 'and, if we miss them, cannot I see you home?'

'But that would be taking you from your friends,' said Miss Jean, with wondering eyes and much divided wishes. As, however, even in this moment, she was already separated from Margaret, there was nothing to be done but accept his companionship.

Jean was in a ferment of excitement and anxiety. It was what she had wished and hoped for—it was delightful—it filled her with an exhilarating sense of help and satisfaction; but, at the same time, if it should turn out to be going against Margaret! How difficult it is in such a terrible, unlooked-for crisis to know exactly what to do! She did what her heart desired, which is the most general solution.

'They will probably turn at the end, and then I can go back to them,' she said. 'And why should Margaret object? for you have always been my friend.'

'Yes,' said Lewis, 'you will recollect it was you I knew first in the family: and I was always supposed to be your visitor. What pleasant hours those were at the piano! Ah, you could not be so cruel as to pass me, to treat me like a stranger. We are in each other's confidence,'

he said, looking so kindly, tenderly at her, with a meaning in his eyes which Miss Jean understood, and which delivered her at once out of her little flutter of timidity. She answered him with a look, and became herself once more.

'It is so indeed,' she said. 'We have both opened our hearts to one another, though I might be your mother. And glad, glad I am to see you. I feel a little lost among all these people, though it is very interesting to watch them: but I am just most happy when I come upon a kent face. And have you been long in London, and have you friends here? Without that there is but little pleasure in it,' Miss Jean said, with a suppressed sigh,.

Then Lewis began to tell her that he had been in town for a week or two, and had gone everywhere looking for her and her sisters; that he had found abundance of friends, people whom he had met abroad, who had known him 'in my god-father's time,' he said.

'I think I know almost all the diplomatic people, and they are a host; and it is wonderful to find how many people one has come across, for everybody goes abroad.'

Jean listened with admiration and a sigh.

'There are few,' she said, 'of these kind of

persons that come in our way, either at Murkley or Gowanbrae.'

Something in her tone attracted his attention, especially to the sentiment of this remark, and Lewis was too sympathetic to be long unacquainted with its meaning.

'No doubt,' he said, 'it is a long time since you have been here: and you find your old friends gone, and strangers in their places.'

'That is just it,' said Miss Jean. 'It has been perhaps a little disappointment—oh, not to Lilias and me, who are delighted to see everything, and never think of parties and things—but Margaret will vex herself about it, wanting the child to enjoy herself, and to see all that's worth seeing. You will understand the feeling. There is some great ball now,' she added, with vague hopes for which she could not account to herself, 'which everybody is speaking of——'

'It is perhaps the Greek ball? Is she going?' cried Lewis, eagerly. 'Ah, that will be what you call luck—great luck for me.'

'I cannot say that she is going—if you mean Margaret,' said Miss Jean, trembling to feel success within reach. 'It is not a thing, you know, that tempts the like of us at our age—but just for Lilias. Well, I cannot say. I

hear people are asking for invitations, which, to my mind, is a wonderful way of going about it. I do not think Margaret, who is a proud person, would ever bring her mind to that.'

'She shall not need,' said Lewis. 'Would she go? Would you go? Dear Miss Jean, will not you do this for me? They are my dear friends, those people. They know me since I was a boy. They will call at once, and send the invitation. If I were not out of favour with your sister, I would come with my friends. But not a word! Do not say a word! It will all pass as if we had nothing to do with it, you and I. That is best; but in return you will see that Miss Lilias saves for me a dance, two dances perhaps.'

'Poor thing!' said Miss Jean, 'my fear just is that she will have all her dances to spare; for we do not know many people, and the people we know are not going—and it is perhaps just a little unfortunate for Lilias.'

'That will not happen again,' cried Lewis, with a glow of pleasure. 'I am not of any good in Murkley, but I can be of some use here.'

In the meantime Lilias, very much disappointed, was demanding an explanation from her sister.

'It was Mr. Murray, Margaret! I would have liked to speak to him. He was always nice. And you liked him well enough at Murkley. He was dressed all right, not like poor Philip. Why might not I stop and speak to him? I had to give him my left hand, for you pulled me away.'

'There was no need for giving him any hand at all. He is just a person we know nothing about—what his family is, if he belongs to anybody,' Miss Margaret said.

'But we know *him*,' said Lilias, with that perfectly inconclusive argument which sounds so powerful to the foolish speaker, but which in reality means nothing.

Margaret was full of irritation and annoyance, and a sense of danger to come.

'What does that matter?' she cried. 'Him! We know no harm of him, if that is what you mean. But his belongings are unknown to me, and with a man of his name, that cannot be but harm. If it was one of your English names, it might just be any ignoramus: but there is no good Murray that has not a drop's blood, as people say, between him and Murkley. I will have no traffic with that young man.'

'But he came to us at home!' said Lilias,

in great surprise, 'and I saw him—often.'

'Where did you see him, you silly thing? Twice, thrice, at the utmost!'

'Oh, Margaret! I used to see him with Katie. Katie was always about the park, you know; and he was so fond of the new castle, and always making sketches——'

Margaret looked at her with severe eyes. And indeed Lilias, who had revealed perhaps more than was expedient, coloured, and was embarrassed by her observation, though she indignantly declared to herself that there was 'no cause.'

'So you saw him—often?' the elder sister said. 'This is news to me—and the more reason we should see nothing of him now; for a young man that will thrust himself upon a girl's company when she is out of the protection of her friends——'

'Margaret!' cried Lilias, with a flash of indignation. 'Are you going to leave Jean behind?' she added, hastily, in a voice of horror, as Margaret, instead of turning back at the end of the walk, hurriedly directed her steps homeward, crossing with haste and trepidation the much crowded road.

'Jean must just take the risk upon herself.

It is no doing of mine. She will tell him no doubt where we are living, and the likelihood is he will see her home. But mind *you*,' said Margaret, turning round upon the girl with that little pause in her walk to emphasize her words, which is habitual with all eloquent persons, 'I will not have that young lad coming about us here. There must be no seeing—often, here—no, nor seldom either. I am your guardian, and I will not be made light of. He is not a person that I consider good enough for your acquaintance, and I will not have it. So you must just choose between him and me.'

'Margaret!' cried Lilias again, in consternation.

Her mind had been agreeably moved by the sight of Lewis. He was more than a kent face, he was a friend: and indeed he was more than a friend. Whatever might be her feelings towards him, on which she had not at all decided, Lilias had a very distinct idea of what his feelings were towards her, and, let theorists say what they will, there is nothing more interesting to a girl than the consciousness that she is—thought of, dreamed of, admired, present to the mind of another, even if she does not permit herself to say beloved. The sight of him had brought

back all those vague pleasures and embarrassments, those shynesses, yet suddenly confidential outbursts, which had beguiled the afternoon hours at Murkley. How friendly he looked! how ready to listen! how full of talk! and how his face had lighted up at the sight of her! He was very different from Philip sucking his stick, not knowing what to do, and from the young men of society, who stared, inspecting the ladies as if that impertinence was a certain duty. Lewis had expanded with pleasure. He had detached himself from his friends in a moment. The sun had shone full upon his head as he stood uncovered, eager to speak. He was not handsome. He was not even tall or big, or in any way imposing. As for the hero of whom Lilias had dreamt so long, Lewis was not in the smallest degree like that paladin; there need be no alarm on that subject. But he was a friend, and to be swept away from a friend in this desert place where there were so few of them, was at once a pain and an injury. What did Margaret mean? Lilias felt herself insulted by the suspicion expressed, which she was too proud to protest against. Her indignant exclamation, 'Margaret!' was all that she would condescend to. And they walked home-

ward through the streets, which Margaret, in despite and alarm, had hastily chosen instead of returning by the park, without saying a word to each other. It was the first time that this had happened in Lilias' life. Her heart grew fuller and fuller as she went home. Was Margaret, the ruler, the universal guide, she who up to this time had been infallible, was she prejudiced, was she unkind? When they reached the house, they separated, neither saying a word. But this was intolerable to Lilias, who by-and-by ran down to Margaret's room, and flung herself into her sister's arms.

'I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it! Scold me, if you like, but speak to me, Margaret,' cried the little girl.

It was a very small matter, yet it was a great matter to them. Margaret took the girl in her arms with a trembling in her own strong and resolute figure.

'You are the apple of my eye, you are the light of my eyes,' she said, which was all the explanation that passed between them. For Lilias was awed by the solemnity of her sister's rarely expressed love. It thrilled her with a wonderful sense of something too great for her own littleness, an undeserved adoration that made her humble. It did not occur to her that

great tyrannies are sometimes the outspring of such a passion. On the contrary, she felt that in the presence of this, her little liking for a cheerful face was as nothing, too trifling a matter to be thought of; and yet there was in her mind a little hankering after that pleasant countenance all the same.

It was some time later before Jean returned, and there was in her a wonderful flutter of embarrassment and delight, and of fictitious composure, and desire to look as if nothing had happened, which filled Lilias with curiosity and Margaret with an angry contempt for her sister, as for an old fool, who was allowing her head to be turned by the attentions of *that* young man. *That* young man was the name Lewis took in the agitated mind of the elder sister. He was not even a long-leggit lad, a member of a well defined and honourable caste, which it is permissible to women to be foolish about. Did the old haverel think that it was really *her* he was wanting?—Margaret asked herself: with a disdain which it wounded her to entertain for her sister.

'He would say he had been just wearying to see you,' she said, when Jean entered late for luncheon, and with her hair hastily brushed,

which the wind had blown about a little under her bonnet. Jean was not too old to indulge in hairdressing, in fringes and curls on her forehead had she so chosen, and indeed the wind would sometimes do as much for her as fashion did for others, finding out unexpected twists and fantasies in her brown locks. She had smoothed herself all down outwardly, but had not quite succeeded in patting down those spiritual signs of a ruffling breeze of excitement which answer to the incipient curls and secret twists in the hair.

'He said he was very glad to see us all, poor lad! It was a great disappointment to him, Margaret, when you just sailed away like that—without a word.'

'I hope,' said Miss Margaret, 'that I am answerable to nobody for the choice I make of my friends, and this young man is one that gives no satisfaction to me.'

'Oh, but, Margaret——' cried Miss Jean, in eager remonstrance.

'I am laying down no laws for you—you are your own mistress, as I am mine; but I will have none of him,' Margaret said, decisively.

This sudden judgment had a great effect upon the gentler sister.

'Oh! but, Margaret,' she repeated, again looking wistfully at the head of the house. Then her anxious eyes sought Lilias. 'I am sure,' she said, 'that one more respectful or more anxious to be of any use——'

'And what use do you expect a lad like that to be?' cried Margaret, with high disdain. 'I hope the Murrays of Murkley will be able to fend for themselves without help from any unknown person,' she added, with lofty superiority.

Jean looked at her with a glance in which there was disappointment, impatience, wistfulness, and something else which Lilias could not divine. There was more in it than mere regret for this ignoring of Lewis' excellencies. There was—could it be possible?—a kind of compassion for the other side. But this was so very unlikely a sentiment to be entertained by Jean for Margaret that Lilias, secretly observing, secretly ranging herself on Jean's side, felt that she must be mistaken. But Jean was not herself; she was so crushed by this conversation that she became silent, and said no more, though it was evident that there came upon her again and again an impulse to talk, which it was scarcely possible to restrain. Something was on her lips to say, which she had driven back almost by force. A concealed

triumph was bursting forth by every outlet. When she sat down to her work, secret smiles would come upon her face. A quiver was in her hands which made her apparent industry quite ineffectual. She would start and look at Lilias when any sound was heard without. Once when Margaret left the room for a moment, Jean made a rush at her little sister and kissed her with an agitation to which Lilias had no clue.

'Just you wait a little; it will come perhaps this afternoon,' cried Miss Jean in her ear.

'Do you expect Mr. Murray, Jean? Oh! Margaret will not be pleased,' Lilias cried, in alarm.

Jean shook her head violently and retreated to the window, where, when Margaret returned to the room, she was standing looking out.

'Dear me! can you not settle to something?' said Margaret. 'I have no nerves to speak of, but to see you whisking about like this is more than I can put up with. The meeting this morning has been too much for you.'

'Oh, how little you know!' cried Jean, under her breath—and this time there was no mistaking the compassion, the reproachful pity in her eyes; but then she added—'Perhaps I am a little agitated, but it is to think you should be so preju-

diced—you that have always had more insight than other folk.'

'If I have had the name of more insight, cannot you believe that I'm right this time?' said Margaret.

Jean, standing at the window looking out, did nothing but shake her head. She was entirely unconvinced. When, however, Margaret announced some time after that she had ordered the victoria, and was going out to make some calls with Lilias, this intimation had a great effect upon Jean. She turned round with a startled look to interpose.

'Dear me, you are not going out again, Margaret! and me so sure you would be at home. You will just tire yourself, and Lilias too: and if you remember that we are going to the play tonight. There are no calls surely that are so urgent as that.'

'Bless me!' said Margaret, taken by surprise, 'what is all this earnestness for? You are perhaps expecting a visit from your friend; but in that case it is far better that Lilias and me should be out of the way.'

'I am expecting no visit from him. I had to tell him, poor lad, that it would be best not to come; but I wish you would stay in, Margaret:

I think it is going to rain, and you have just an open carriage, no shelter. And you can never tell who may call. You said yourself that when you went out in the afternoon you missed just the people you most wanted to see.'

'I am expecting nobody to-day,' said Margaret; 'and, if anybody comes, there is you to see them.'

'Me!' cried Jean, with a nervous tremor. 'And what could I say to them? What if it should be strangers?'

'I hope you have a good Scots tongue in your head,' said Miss Margaret, somewhat warmly perhaps. But Lilias lingered to console the poor lady, whose look of alarm and trouble was greater than any mere possibility could have produced.

'Oh! my darling, try to persuade her to stay at home; but mind you do not say a word,' cried Jean in the ear of Lilias, holding her two arms. 'I think there may perhaps be—some grand people coming. And how could I speak to them?'

'What grand people?' the girl cried.

'Oh, hold your tongue—hold your tongue, Lilias! I would not have her suspect—but who can tell what kind of people may be coming?

Something always happens when people are out; and then this ball——'

'Margaret,' cried Lilias, 'don't go out this afternoon. Jean thinks that people may be calling—somebody who could get us tickets——'

'Oh! not me, not me,' cried Jean, putting her hand on the girl's mouth. 'I never said such a thing. It was just an imagination—or a presentiment——'

'Well,' said Margaret, with her bonnet on, 'Jean is just as able to receive the finest company as I am. She is looking very nice, she has a little colour. To be silly now and then is good for the complexion; she is fluttered with the sight of her young friend—is it friend you call him, Jean?'

'What could I call him else?' cried Jean, with dignity. 'I will never call a man more, as you well know; and besides, I might be his mother. And why should I call him less, seeing he has always been so good to me, and one that I think much of? But I am not expecting Mr. Murray, you need not be feared for that. It is just a kind of presentiment,' Miss Jean said.

CHAPTER V.

MISS JEAN sat down to her work at the window when the others went out. There was a balcony full of flowers which prevented her from seeing anything more distinct than the coming and going of the carriages, but that was enough to keep her in a flutter of awed and excited expectation. Lewis had said that his friends would call at once, and the idea of receiving a foreign lady, a foreign ambassadress, who perhaps did not speak English, made Miss Jean tremble from the lace of her cap to the toe of her slipper. She tried to remember the few words of school-book French which lingered in her mind; but what if the lady spoke only Greek? In that case, their intercourse would need to be carried on by signs: or, since she was an ambassadress, she would perhaps carry an interpreter with her. Jean did not know the manners and habits of such people. To be left to encounter such a formidable person alone

was terrible to her. And what would so great a lady think if she came in expecting Margaret, whom no doubt Lewis would have described, and found only Jean? 'We saw nobody but a homely sort of country person,'—that was what she would say. But the case was desperate, and though, when the moment actually arrived, and an imposing carriage and pair dashed up with all the commotion possible to the door, and the knocker resounded through the house, Miss Jean's heart beat so loudly in her ears that it drowned the very knocker, yet still there was a sort of satisfaction in thus venturing for the sake of Lilias, facing such an excitement for her benefit, and obtaining for her what even Margaret had not been able to obtain.

Simon, creaking along the passage in his creaking shoes, seemed to tread upon Miss Jean's heart. Would he never be ready? She waited, expecting every moment the door to open, the sweep of silken draperies, or perhaps —who could tell?—the entrance of a resplendent figure in costume other than that of fashion; for Jean was aware that Greece was in the east, and had been delivered in her youth out of its subjection to the Turks, and that the men wore kilts, and the women probably——

These were long before the days of the dual dress, and the idea filled her with alarm. She put away her work with trembling hands, and stood listening, endeavouring to calm herself and make her best curtsey, but in a whirl of anxiety lest Simon should not say the name right or else be unable to catch it. But when, instead of this extraordinary ordeal, she heard the clang, the stir, the glittering sound of hoofs and wheels and harness, and became aware that the carriage had driven away, Jean came to herself quite suddenly, as if she had fallen to the ground. It was a relief unspeakable, but perhaps, also, it was a little disappointment. She dropped back upon her chair. To go through so many agonies of anticipation for nothing is trying too. And Simon came upstairs as if he were counting his steps, as if it was of no consequence!

'I told them you were in, Miss Jean, but they just paid no attention to me: and I do not think you have lost much, for they were too flyaway, and not of your kind. I hope there's cards enough: and this big letter, with a seal as large as Solomon's,' said Simon.

She took them with another jump of her heart. The envelope was too big for the little

tray on which he had placed it; it was half covered with a great blazon. The cards were inscribed with a name which it taxed all Jean's powers to make out. She was so moved that she made a confidant of Simon, having no one else to confide in.

'It's an invitation,' she said, 'for one of the grandest balls in all London.'

Simon, for his part, looked down upon the magnificent enclosure without any excitement, with a cynical eye.

'It's big enough to be from the Queen,' he said, 'and it will keep ye up to a' the hours of the night, and the poor horse just hoasting his head off. You'll excuse me, Miss Jean, but I cannot help saying rather you than me.'

'I should have thought, Simon,' said Miss Jean, reproachfully, 'that you would have had some feeling for Miss Lilias.'

'Oh! I have plenty of feeling for Miss Lilias; but sitting up till two or three, or maybe four in the morning is good for nobody,' Simon said.

Miss Jean could not keep still. As for work, that was impossible. She met Margaret at the door, when the little victoria drove up, with a countenance as pale as ashes.

'God bless me!' cried Margaret, in alarm, 'what has happened?'

Jean thrust the cards and the envelope into her hands.

'You will know,' she said, breathless, 'what they mean better than me.' Miss Jean salved her conscience by adding to herself, 'And so she will! for she understands everything better than I do.'

'What is it, Margaret?' said Lilias.

The ladies had been engaged all the afternoon in a hopeless effort of which Lilias was entirely unconscious; they had gone to call on a number of people in whom the girl, at least, felt no interest, but to whom Margaret had condescended with a civility which her little sister could not understand— The countess, who was too much occupied to pay them any attention, and Lady Ida, who thought quite enough had been done for the country neighbours, and was inclined to show that she was bored: and the wife of the county member, who was on the other side in politics, and consequently received the Miss Murrays with respect but coldness, and some dowagers, who had almost forgotten Margaret, and some new people who were barely acquainted with her—— Why did she take all that trouble?

'You are bound,' Miss Margaret said, 'when

you are in London just to keep up everybody. You never can tell when they may be of use.'

'Is it to make them of use that you are friends with people?' Lilias had asked, with wonder. But they were of no use. How was it possible? And, even if they had been likely to be so, Margaret's heart had failed her. She was not used to such manœuvres. She came back in very low spirits, feeling that it was impossible, feeling impotent, and feeling humiliated not so much because of her impotence, as from a contempt of her own aim. Between the two her heart had sunk altogether. To think it possible that she, Margaret Murray, should be going from door to door in a strange place, seeking an invitation to a ball! Was such ignominy possible? She was angry with herself, angry with the world in which trifles were of so much importance, angry with that big, pitiless place, which had no knowledge of the Murrays of Murkley, and cared for neither an old race, nor a lovely young creature like Lilias, nor anything but just monstrous wealth and impudence: for that was how Margaret put it, being disheartened and disappointed and disgusted with herself. And coming in, in this state of mind, to meet Jean, pale as a ghost, what could she think of but

misfortune? She expected to hear that Murkley Castle had been burnt to the ground, or that their 'man of business' had run away. Poor Mr. Allenerly, who was as safe as Edinburgh Castle standing on a rock! but panic does not wait to count probabilities. When the big envelope was thrust into her hand she looked at it with alarm, as if it might wound her. And to think, after all this mortification, disgust, and terror, to think of finding, what at this moment looked like everything she desired, in her hand! For the time, forgetting the frivolous character of the blessing, Margaret was inclined to believe with a softening and grateful movement of her heart that it had fallen upon her direct from heaven.

And during the rest of the afternoon no other subject was thought of. When the ladies assembled over their tea in delightful relaxation and coolness after the fuss and flutter of their walks and drives, and those afternoon calls, which had brought nothing but vexation, the little scene was worthy of any comedy. The delight of Lilias, which was entirely natural and easy, had no such impassioned character about it as the restrained and controlled exultation which showed in Margaret's quietest words and move-

ments. Jean, who was still pale and trembling with the dread of detection and the strain of excitement, by-and-by began to regard, with a wonder for which there was no words, her sister's perfect unconsciousness and absence of suspicion. To associate this envied distinction with Jean or anything she could have done, or with the slight person whom she had declined to have anything to say to in the morning, whose overtures she had negatived so sternly, never entered Margaret's thoughts. In the happiness and calm that came over her after the first ecstasy, she indulged, indeed, in a number of speculations. But, after all, what so natural as that the lady with the wonderful name, which none of them ventured to pronounce, had heard that the Miss Murrays of Murkley were in town, and perhaps had them pointed out to her somewhere, and felt that without Lilias the ball would be incomplete.

'It might be the countess, but I can hardly think it, or she would have let fall something to that effect,' Margaret said; 'and as for Mrs. Maxwell, they are just in a sort of House-of-Commons circle, and know little about fashion. But I am not surprised for my part: for, after all, family is a thing that does tell in society, and I have always felt that what was wanted was just

to have it known we were here. Yes, it is a great pleasure, I do not deny it—though if anybody had told me I would have been so pleased to get an invitation to a ball at my age——'

'It is not for yourself, Margaret.'

'—But I am not surprised. The wonder has been the little attention we have received: but I make little doubt we'll have even too much to fill up our time now it is known we are here. And, Lilias, you must remember I will not allow too much of it, to turn your head.'

Lilias did not make any reply. She was studying the face of Jean, who was very intent upon Margaret, following her looks with wondering admiration, and half struggling against her better knowledge to believe that her sister must be in the right after all.

'You see,' said Margaret, discoursing pleasantly and at her ease, as she leant back in her chair, 'we are all apt to judge the world severely when we are not just getting what we want. I confess that I was in a very ill key the other night. To be in the middle of a large company all enjoying themselves, and acquainted with each other, and to know nobody, is a trial for the temper. And as I am a masterful person by nature, and perhaps used to my own way, I

did not put up with it as I ought. And if I had left town in a pet—as I had a great mind to do—the impression would just never have been removed. But you see what a little patience does. Indeed I have remarked before this that, when you see everything at its blackest, Providence is just preparing a surprise for you, and things are like to mend.'

'If one can say Providence, Margaret,' said Jean, a little shocked, 'about such a thing as a ball!'

'Do you think there is anything, great or small, that is beneath that?' Margaret cried; but she felt herself abashed at having gone so far. 'I am not meaning the ball,' she said. 'What I am meaning is just the recognition that we had a kind of a right to look for, and the friendship and understanding which is the due of a family long established, and that has been of use to its country, like ours. I hope you do not think that beneath the concern of Providence—for the best of life is in it,' she added, taking high ground. 'Little things may be signs of it: but you will not say it is a little thing to be well thought upon and duly honoured among your peers.'

To this Jean listened with her lips dropping

a little apart, and her eyes more wide open than their wont, altogether abashed by the importance of the doctrine involved, not knowing how to fit it into her own ideal of existence, and half tempted to confess that it was by her simple instrumentality, and not in so dignified a way, that the event had come about.

'But, Margaret——' she said.

'My dear, I wish you would not be always so ready with your buts. You are just becoming a sort of Thomas, aye doubting,' Margaret said. 'But, Jean—if you are going to the play, as you are so fond of, we will have to be earlier than usual—and, in that case, it is time to dress: though I am so tired, and have so much to think of, that I would rather stay at home.'

'There will be your ticket lost,' said Jean, though in her heart she was almost glad to have a little time out of Margaret's presence to realise all that had passed on this agitating day.

'You can send it to Philip Stormont,' said Margaret, moved to unusual good humour, 'and take him with you. To look for your carriage, and all that, he will be more use than old Simon. No, it is true I have no great opinion of him. He is just a long-leggit lad. He has little brains, and less manners, and his family

is just small gentry; but still he's maybe a little forlorn, and in a strange place he will look upon us as more or less belonging to him.'

'Oh, Margaret!' cried Jean, almost with tears in her eyes, 'that is a thing I would never have thought of. There is nobody like you for a kind heart.'

Margaret said 'Toot!' but did not resent the imputation. 'When you find that you are thought upon yourself, it makes you more inclined to think upon other people. And I'll not deny that I am pleased. To think you and me, Jean, should be making all this work about a ball! I am just ashamed of myself,' she said, with a little laugh of pleasure.

But Jean did not make any response. She sent off old Simon to the address which Philip even in the few moments they had seen him had found time to give, and went upstairs to prepare in the silence of bewiderment, not able to explain to herself the curious self-deception and mistake of the sister to whom she had always looked up. She had been afraid of being seen through at once: her tremor, her excitement, her breathless consciousness, all, Jean had feared would betray her yet: Mar-

garet had never observed them at all! She was glad, but she was also bewildered on her sister's account, and half humiliated on her own. For to have been suspected would have been something. Not to have even been suspected at all, with so many signs of guilt about her, was so wonderful that it took away her breath. And, tenderly respectful as her mind was, she felt a little ashamed, a little to blame that Margaret had been so easily deceived. Her satisfaction in her delusion abashed Jean. She saw a grotesque element in it, when she knew how completely mistaken it was. Lilias, who had been questioning her with her eyes without attracting much attention from Jean, whose mind was busy elsewhere, followed her upstairs. If Margaret did not suspect the secret with which she was running over, Lilias did. She put her arm round the conspirator from behind, making her start.

'It is you, Jean,' she whispered in her ear.

'Oh! me, Lilias! How could it be me? Do I know these kind of foreign folk?'

'Then you know who it is, and you are in the secret,' Lilias said.

Jean threw an alarmed glance towards Margaret's closed door.

'You are to keep two dances for him,' she whispered, hurriedly; 'but if I had thought what a deception it would be, Lilias! It just makes me meeserable!'

'I hope you will never have anything worse to be miserable about,' said the girl, with airy carelessness.

'Oh! whisht, whisht!' cried Miss Jean, 'it would go to her very heart,' and she led the indiscreet commentator on tiptoe past Margaret's door. Lilias sheltered herself within her own with a beating heart. To keep two dances for him! Then it was he who had done it. It did not occur to Lilias that to call any man *he* was dangerous and significant. She had not a doubt as to who was meant. Though she had not been allowed to speak to him, scarcely to look at him, yet he had instantly exerted himself to do her pleasure. Lilias sat down to think it over, and forgot all about the early dinner and the play. Her heart beat high as she thought of the contrast. She had no knowledge of the world, or the way in which girls and boys comport themselves to each other nowadays, which is so different from the way of romance. To think that he should have set to work to procure a gratification for her, though

she had been made to slight him, pleased her fancy. Why did he do it? It could not be for friendship, because she was not allowed to show him any. Was it—perhaps—for the sake of Jean? In the unconscious insolence of her youth, Lilias laughed softly at this hypothesis. Dear Jean! there was nobody so kind and sweet; but not for such as Jean, she thought, were such efforts made. It would have disappointed her perhaps a little had she known that Lewis was entirely capable of having done it for Jean's sake, even if he had not had the stronger inducement of doing it for herself. But this did not occur to her as she sat and mused over it with a dreamy smile wavering upon her face. She did not ask herself anything about her own sentiments, or, indeed, about his sentiments. She only thought of him as she had done more or less since the morning in a sort of happy dream, made up of pleasure in seeing him again, and of a vague sense that herself and the future were somehow affected by it, and that London was brighter and far more interesting because he was in it. To think of walking any morning round the street corner, and seeing him advancing towards her with that friendly look! It had always been such a friendly look, she

said to herself, with a little flutter at her heart. The bell ringing for dinner startled her suddenly out of these thoughts, and she had to dress in haste and hurry downstairs, where they were all awaiting her, Philip looking red and sunburnt in his evening clothes. He was never a person who had very much to say, and he was always overawed by Margaret, though she was kind to him beyond all precedent. He told them about his voyage and the Mediterranean, and the places he had seen—with diffidence, drawn out by the elder ladies, who wished to set him at his ease. But Lilias was preoccupied, and said little to him. She felt that she was on no terms of ceremony with Philip. She knew a great deal more about him than the others did. She had borne inconveniences and vexations for him such as nobody knew of —even now to think of his mother's affectionate adoption and triumph in the supposed triumph of her son brought an angry red on Lilias' cheek. All this made her entirely at her ease with Philip. There could be no mistake between them. She behaved to him as she might have behaved to a younger brother, one who had cost her a great deal of trouble—that is to say, that he might have been a gooseberry-bush or a cab-

bage-rose for anything Lilias cared. She took his attendance as a matter of course, and gave him the orders about the carriage with perfect calm. Philip on his part was by no means so composed. There was a certain suppressed excitement about him. He had been chilled to find that Lilias was not down when he came in and feared for the moment that he was to go to the theatre with the elder ladies: but the appearance of the younger set this right. Lilias immediately decided in her own mind that some new crisis had occurred in the love struggle of which she was the confidant, and that it was his anxiety to speak to her on the subject which agitated Philip. She took the trouble to contrive that she should sit next to him, letting Jean pass in before her, and as soon as there was an opportunity, when Jean's attention was engaged, she took the initiative, and whispered, 'You have something to tell me?' in Philip's ear.

He started as if he had been shot; and looked at her eagerly, guiltily.

'Yes—there's a good deal to tell you: if you will listen,' he said, with something between an entreaty and a defiance, as if he scarcely believed that her benevolence would go so far.

'Of course I will listen,' said Lilias; and she added, 'I have not heard from her for a long time, Philip. Wasn't she very wretched about it when you came away?'

A guilty colour came over Philip's face. He had looked a sort of orange brown before, but he now became a dusky crimson.

'I don't know whom you mean,' he said, 'by *she*,' and stared at Lilias with something like a challenge.

Lilias, for her part, opened her eyes twice as large as usual, and gazed upon him.

'You—don't—know! I think you must be going out of your senses,' she said, briskly, with elder-sisterly intolerance. 'Who should it be but one person? Do you think I am some one else than Lilias that you speak like that to me?'

'Indeed,' said Philip, growing more and more crimson, 'it is just because you are Lilias that I am here.'

This speech was so extraordinary that it took Lilias an entire act to get over its startling effect, which was like a dash of cold water in her face. By the time the act was over, she had made out an explanation of it: which was that the something he had to tell her was something that only a listener so entirely sympathetic and

well-informed as herself could understand. Accordingly, as soon as the curtain had fallen, she turned to him again.

'Philip, I am afraid it must be something very serious that has happened, and you want me to interfere. Perhaps you have quarrelled with her—but you used to do that almost every day.'

'There is nothing about her at all—whoever you mean by her,' Philip replied, with angry embarrassment, and a little shrinking from her eyes.

'Nothing about Katie! Then you *have* quarrelled?' Lilias cried. 'I had a kind of instinct that told me; and that is why you are looking so glum, poor boy.'

If Philip was crimson before, he became purple now.

'I wish,' he said, 'that you would not try like this to fix me down to a childish piece of nonsense that nobody approved. Do you think a man doesn't outgrow such things?—do you think he can shut his eyes and not see that others——'

Philip had never said so many words straight on end in all his life, nor, if he had not been tantalised beyond bearing, would he have said them now. Lilias fixed her eyes upon him gravely, without a sign of any consciousness that she

was herself concerned. She was very serious, contemplating him with a sort of scientific observation; but it was science touched with grief and disapproval, things with which scientific investigation has nothing to do.

'Do you mean to say that you are inconstant?' she said, with solemnity. 'I have never met with that before. Then, Philip,' she added, after a pause, 'if that is so, everything is over betwixt you and me.'

'What do you mean by saying everything is over?' he cried—'everything is going to begin.'

She drew a little away from him with an instinctive movement of delicacy, withdrawing her cloak, which had touched him. She disapproved of him, as one of a superior race disapproves of a lower being. She shook her head quietly, without saying any more. If he were inconstant, what was there that could be said for him or to him? He was outside the pale of Lilias' charity. She turned round and began to talk to Jean at the other side. There had been a distinct bond between him and her; she had been Katie's friend, their confidant, and she had been of use to them. There must always be, while this lasted, a link between Philip and herself; but all was over when that was broken.

in the neighbourhood put, so to speak, under her feet, if, in the midst of this glory, she is aware that her girls are not dancing, or that her son is considered by some important maiden an awkward lout.

The poor lady with half a dozen ungainly daughters, who appears everywhere, and who is held up to so much ridicule, how her heart cries out against the neglect which they have to suffer! Her struggles to get them partners, her wistful looks at everybody who can befriend them, which are all ridiculous and humiliating enough, have a pathos in them which is heart-rending in its way. The cause of the sudden coldness which crept over Margaret, into her very heart like the east wind, and paralysed her for the moment, was not perhaps a very solemn one. It was no more than tragi-comic at the best; it was the terrible question, suddenly seizing upon her like a thief in the night, how, now that she had secured her ball, she was to secure partners for Lilias? Those who laugh at such an alarm have never had to encounter it. What if, after this unexpected good fortune, almost elevated in its unexpectedness and greatness into a gift from heaven, what if it should only be a repetition of the other night? Visions of sitting

against the wall all the night through, looking out wistfully upon an ungenial crowd, all occupied with themselves, indifferent to strangers, rose suddenly before her troubled eyes. To see the young men come in drawing on their gloves, staring round them at the girls all sitting expectant, of whom Lilias should be one, and passing her by, was something which Margaret felt no amount of philosophy, no strength of mind could make her able to bear. She grew cold and then hot at the prospect. It was thus they had passed an hour or two in the countess's drawing-room, ignored by the fine company; but in a ball it would be more than she should be able to bear. She had scarcely time to feel the legitimate satisfaction in her good fortune, when the terror of this contingency swooped down upon her. She had stayed at home with the intention of having a few peaceful hours, and thinking over Lilias' dress, and anticipating her triumph, when suddenly in a moment came that black horseman who is always at our heels, and who had been unhorsed for a moment by the shock of good fortune—got up again and careered wildly about and around her, putting a hoof upon her very heart.

It is not to be supposed that Margaret was

unconscious of the fact, which the simplest moralist could perceive, that to regard a frivolous occurrence like a ball with feelings so serious was excessive and inappropriate. Nobody could be more fully aware of this. She, Margaret, a woman not without pretensions, if not to talent, at least to the still more wonderful gift of capacity, that she should give herself all this fyke and trouble, and just wear her very heart out about a thing so unimportant! But who can regulate his feelings by such thought? Who can hold a fire in his hand by thinking on the frosty Caucasus? But all her self-reminders to this effect did nothing for her. Her scorn of any other woman who concentrated her being on such frivolity would have been as scathing as ever, but the fact remained that of all the many objects of desire in this world not one seemed to her at the moment half so important. Poor Margaret! her very goodness and piety added torments to her pain; for she had been so used to pray for everything she desired warmly that in the fervour of her heart she had almost formulated a new petition, before she bethought herself, and stopped abashed. 'Lord send partners for Lilias!' Could any travesty of piety be more profane? Margaret

checked herself with unmingled horror, yet returned to the subject unawares, and almost had uttered that innocent blasphemy a second time, so great was her confusion—a fact which was not without some pathos, though she herself, grieved and horrified, was unaware of this. The overwhelming character of this new care disturbed all her plans, and, instead of sitting tranquil enjoying her solitude and thinking over her preparations, Margaret hastened to bed on pretence of weariness, but in reality to escape, if possible, from herself. Pausing first to look at the cards which had been left in the afternoon, and which the delight of the invitation had made her neglect, she found the card of Lewis, and stood pondering over it for full five minutes. Simon, who had been summoned to put out the lamps, gave a glance over his mistress's shoulder, with the confidence of a rural retainer, to see what it was that occupied her. Margaret put the card down instantly. She said,

'Simon, I see Mr. Murray, who was at Murkley, has been here this afternoon.'

'Yes, Miss Margaret,' said Simon; 'he has been here. He asked for you all, and he said he was glad to see me, and that I must be a

comfort (which I have little reason to suppose); but maist probably that was just all blethers to get round me.'

'And why should Mr. Murray wish to get round you?' said Margaret; but she did not wait for any reply. 'If he calls again, and Miss Jean happens to be in, you will be sure to bring him upstairs; but if she is not in the house, and me alone, it will perhaps not be advisable to do that. You must exercise your discretion, Simon.'

'No me, mem,' said Simon. 'I'll exercise no discretion. I hope I know my place better than that. A servant is here to do what he is bid—and no to think about his master's concerns; but if you'll take my advice——'

'I will take none of your advice,' cried Margaret, almost angrily.

What contemptible weakness was it that made her give directions for the problematical admission of the stranger whom she had made up her mind to shut out and reject? Alas for human infirmity! It was because it had suddenly gleamed upon her as a possibility that Lewis might be going to the ball too!

When the momentous evening arrived, Lilias herself, though, with unheard of extravagance, another new and astonishing dress had been

added to her wardrobe, did not quiver with excitement like Margaret. The girl was just pleasantly excited; pleased with herself, her appearance, her prospect of pleasure, and if with a little thrill of keener expectation in the recollection of the 'two dances' mysteriously reserved for 'him,' of whom Jean, even in moments of confidence, would speak no more clearly—yet still entirely in possession of herself, with none of the haze of suspense in her eyes or heart, of anxiety in her mind, which made her elder sister unlike herself. Margaret was so sorely put to it to preserve her self-control that she was graver than usual, without a smile about her, when, painfully conscious that she did not even know her hostess, she led her little train into the dazzling rooms, decorated to the last extremity of artistic decoration, of the Greek Embassy. A dark lady, blazing with diamonds, made a step forward to meet her: and then our three strangers, somewhat bewildered, passed on into the fairyland, which was half Oriental, half European, as became the nationality of the hosts. Even the anxiety of Margaret was lulled at first by the wonder of everything about her. They had come early, as inexperienced people do, and the assembled

company was still a little fragmentary. The country ladies discovered with great relief that it was the right thing to admire and to express their admiration, which gave them much emancipation; for they had feared it might be vulgar, or old-fashioned, or betray their inacquaintance with such glories, if they ventured openly to comment upon them. But, after all, to find themselves, a group of country ladies knowing nobody, dropped as from the skies on the skirts of a magnificent London mob belonging to the best society, was an appalling experience, when the best was said; and they had all begun to feel as they did at the countess's party, before aid and the guardian angel in whom Miss Jean trusted, but whom even Lilias knew little about, who he was—appeared. They had not ventured to go far from the door, having that determination never to intrude into high places probably intended for greater persons, which turns the humility of the parable into the most strenuous exhibition of pride that the imagination can conceive. Nobody should ever say to Margaret, 'Give this man place.' She stood, with Lilias on one side of her, and Jean on the other, half a step in advance of them, and felt herself stiffening into stone as

she gazed at the stream of new arrivals, and watched all the greetings around her. Every new group was more splendid, she thought, than the other. If now and then a dowdy person, or an old lady wrapped in dirty lace, appeared among the grand toilettes, the eyes of the three instinctively sought her as perhaps a sister in distress: but experience soon showed that the dowdy ladies were often the most elevated, and that no fellowship of this description was to be looked for. Dancing began in the large rooms while this went on, and, with a sensation of despair, Margaret felt that all her terrors were coming true.

'My darling,' she said, turning to Lilias with a fondness in which she seldom indulged, 'you must just think, you know, that this grand sight is like coming to the play. If it is just a sight, you will be pleased to have seen it—and, when there are so many people, it cannot be very pleasant dancing; and, my sweet, if by any sacrifice of money, or trouble, or whatever woman could do, I could have made friends for you, or gotten you partners—But it is just a beautiful sight——'

'I would rather have our parties at home,' said Lilias, plaintively, looking with wistful eyes

towards the doorway, through which an opening in the crowd permitted the sight now and then of the happy performers in that whirl of pleasure from which she was shut out. But she had a high spirit. She threw up her fair head, and would have performed her little skip upon the floor had there been room for it. 'We are three Peris at the gate of Paradise, and that's too many,' she said, with a laugh.

Margaret was in no laughing mood. Dignity, which was almost tragical, was in her whole person. The pose of her head, the stateliness of her aspect, were enough to have dismayed any applicant for favour. She began to eye the groups about, not anxiously as she had done at first, but defiantly, as if she scorned them for their ignorance of her.

'I cannot say that I am surprised,' she said; 'for I counted the cost—and I thought you would be better pleased to come and just see what like it was. And then we can go away when we please.' Margaret added this forlorn consolation with a sigh. 'What are you saying, Jean?' she asked, somewhat sharply; for her sister's voice reached her ear, not tuned at all in harmony with her own, but with a tone of exultation in it. It would be the music that

pleased her, or some dress that she was admiring! Margaret, in her vexation and disappointment—though indeed she had expected to be disappointed—turned round upon her sister with rage in her soul. Lilias had turned round too, with perhaps sharper ears, and, before Margaret had recovered her composure, she found herself addressed in tones whose blandishments she had rejected, but which now, against her will, her heart beat to hear. There was the little strange accent, the inflection not like anyone else's, which had always hitherto moved her to impatience—for why should a man pretending to be an Englishman, and calling himself by a good Scots name, speak like a foreigner? All this passed through her mind like a sudden flash of a lantern, and then she found herself looking at Lewis with her most forbidding aspect, a frown upon her brow, but the profoundest anxiety in her heart.

'You are not in a good position here,' he was saying, 'and soon there will be a great crowd. May I take you to a better place?'

'Oh! we are in a very good place for seeing, Mr. Murray, I am obliged to you. We are not like friends of the house to take the best places. We are just strangers, and enjoying,'

said Margaret, in her sternest tones, 'the fine sight.'

'We are all friends of the house who are here,' said Lewis, 'and there is no place that would be thought too good for Miss Murray. You would like to see your sister when she is dancing: let me take you into the other room,' he said, offering his arm, with a smile which even Margaret felt to be almost irresistible. She said to herself that it was French and false, 'like all these foreigners,' but this was a secret protest of the pride which was about to yield to necessity. She made a little struggle, looking at him with a cloudy brow. 'Your sister—will like to dance,' said Lewis.

And then Margaret threw down her weapons; but only after a fashion. She took his arm with proud hesitation and reluctance.

'You just vanquish me,' she said, 'with that word; but I am not sure it is quite generous. And, if I take advantage of your present offer, you will remember it is in pure selfishness, and alters nothing of what has passed between us. You will make nothing by it,' she said.

He had the audacity to press her hand a little closer to his side with something like a caress, and he laughed.

'In pure selfishness,' he said. 'I accept the bargain. Nothing is altered, only a truce for reasons of state. But I must be free to act according to the same rule of pure selfishness too.'

Margaret gave him another keen look. She was not sure that he was clever enough to mean what he was saying; but she did not commit herself by any further explanation. She said, 'We will just stay where we can see what is going on, Mr. Murray. Lilias, who is a stranger here, does not expect to dance.'

Lewis smiled. He led the ladies to a sofa, where there was room for Margaret, and introduced her to a lady in diamonds, who called him Lewis.

'Take care of Miss Murray,' he said, 'duchess;' and, leaving Margaret, approached Lilias, who stood demure behind her. Duchess! Margaret's head seemed to spin round. She sank down by the side of this new and magnificent acquaintance, who smiled graciously, and made room for her. It was like a transformation scene.

'He is your relation, I suppose,' said the great lady, with benign looks.

'I cannot say that,' Margaret answered, with a gasp of astonishment and dismay. 'I do not even know what Murrays——'

'Ah! in Scotland one knows you are all related.' Margaret's horror at this statement may be more easily imagined than described, as the newspapers say; but there was no pause to give an opportunity for the indignant explanation that rose to her lips. 'But I forgot,' the duchess said, 'there is quite a romantic story. Anyhow, he is a dear boy. There is no family that might not be proud to claim him. And that pretty creature who is dancing with Lewis. She is your—niece?'

'My sister,' said Margaret. 'It is a long story. My father, General Murray of Murkley, married twice——'

'Ah! I knew you were related somehow. And that is your sister? You must feel quite like a mother to her. She is a most perfect little Scotch beauty—that lovely hair and that sweet complexion.'

'And as good as she is bonnie,' cried Miss Jean, who was standing beaming at the end of the sofa. The unknown duchess lifted her eyes with some surprise, and made her a small bow.

'I can very well believe it. I have a grandchild nearly that age, and she seems to me an angel. I could wish that she should never grow any older.'

'Oh, no, madam,' said Jean, whose heart responded to the eyes of the other, as Margaret, proud, suspicious, and dominant, could not permit herself to do. It seemed to Jean in her simplicity that some word of respect ought to be added when she spoke to a duchess. 'They are more sweet than words can say,' said the simple woman, 'but we must not for any pleasure of ours keep them from living their life.'

'Will not you sit down?' said the duchess; 'it is very hard standing all the evening through, when you are not accustomed to it. You interest me very much. I am sure you have thought a great deal on the subject.'

'My sister Jean,' said Margaret, 'has instincts that come to her like other people's thoughts. She is not very wise, perhaps. But, if you will allow me, Scotland is just the country where such ideas should not be encouraged, for our names being names of clans, are just spread among all classes, and——'

The duchess was much experienced in society, and never permitted herself to be bored, which is one of the first rules for a great lady. She suffered just that faintest shadow of indiffereuce to steal over her face, which warns the initiated, and said, sweetly,

'I have heard of that—it must be embarrassing. I am going to have a little dance on the 17th—may I hope that you will bring your young sister to it? It is a great pleasure to see anything so fresh and fair: and Lewis may always command me for his friends,' this gracious lady said. And then she turned and talked to Jean, and ended by arranging to convey her to a very recondite performance of classical music a few days after. She left her seat on the sofa by-and-by, seeing, as she said, some friends arrive whom she must talk to. But this was not the only incident of the kind which made the evening remarkable. In the course of these exciting hours Margaret and Jean made the acquaintance of several other distinguished personages who were giving entertainments, and who hoped they would bring their young sister. They did not like to venture far from the spot where all this had occurred, but they abandoned the sofa, with their sensitive fear of being supposed to take too much upon them, and stood for the most of the night, confused with all that passed, watching Lilias through every dance, following her with their eyes when she disappeared in the crowd. Jean was perfectly, ecstatically happy; though her unaccustomed limbs were trembling

under her, she stood up heroic, and never complained since Margaret thought it right to stand lest they might be taking up somebody's place. Margaret's happiness was not so complete. She was able for a time to enjoy the consciousness that all her troublous thoughts had come to nothing, and that Lilias' *succès* was unquestionable. But, alas! there came with this the thought that it was all owing to Lewis. His friends had given the invitations; the young men who were contending for Lilias' dances were all friends of his. It was supposed that the ladies were his relatives, a family group whom he had brought up, all fresh and original, from the country. Thus the sweetness was encompassed with bitterness, and surrounded with embarrassment. How was she to keep her hostile position and receive such favours?—and, if she allowed Lilias to be won after all this trouble by a young man who had proposed for her in Murkley, what was the object of all the care and expenditure? But that hypothesis was impossible; it was not to be contemplated for a moment. Lilias to marry a plain Mr. Murray, a person who was nobody, whose very right to the name was doubtful—such a thing was not to be thought of. And, though he had so many friends, these afforded

no indication as to the standing of his family, nor did anybody seem to know what his family was, or they would not—not even those inconsiderate persons in London, who, Miss Margaret said, 'absolutely knew nothing' about families in Scotland—have thought of supposing that he was related to Murkley. Her enjoyment was marred by all these questions and thoughts, which kept her still alive and awake when, in the dawning, Lewis put them into their carriage—Lewis again—always Lewis. It was to Margaret he devoted himself; he had taken her to supper, he had paid every attention that a son or brother could have paid her.

'We are enemies,' he had said—'generous enemies respecting each other. We will hob and nob to-night, but to-morrow I know you will not recognise me in the Row.'

'I am far from sure that I am going to the Row—it is just a waste of time,' Margaret said, with a literalness which it pleased her sometimes to affect. And Lewis laughed. He was himself somewhat excited, and his laugh had a nervous sound. He had been very generous, he felt. He had not tried to absorb Lilias; the utmost propriety had regulated all his actions;

he had presented to her the most attractive people he knew; his behaviour had been almost angelic. He held Margaret's hand for a moment (he was so audacious) as she followed the others into the carriage.

'We are to go on the same rule as before,' he said; 'it is to be pure selfishness; but you will not refuse to accept other invitations for fear of meeting me.'

'You are right about the principle, Mr. Murray,' said Margaret, with seriousness, 'but, as for your fine friends and their invitations, it will be time enough to answer them when I get them. Word of mouth is one thing—but more is necessary for Lilias.' And then she bade him 'good night,' or rather 'good morning,' leaning out of the window of the carriage to prevent any interchange of glances. There was pure selfishness in that action, at least.

From this time the remainder of their season in London was almost too brilliant. Though Margaret was greatly subdued, and would take little pleasure in the thought that it was 'the best people' to whose houses they went, and whose acquaintance they made, she yet did not refuse the invitations, and watched Lilias enjoying herself with a swelling heart. Lilias, for her part, had

no *arrière pensée*. She enjoyed her gaieties with all her heart, and recovered from her awe, and set as small store by her partners and admirers as she had done at Murkley. She had 'got out her horns again,' Margaret said. She took little airs upon her, and refused the languid gentlemen who proposed themselves in tones which invited refusal. But even these languid gentlemen did not like to be refused, and woke up, startled and tingling, when they came into contact with this independent little beauty. For it had been decided that she was a beauty in the highest circles. At home she had only been a pretty girl; but, when fashion took Lilias up, she became a beauty out of hand. Let nobody be deceived, however, and think that her photograph was in the shop-windows or the newspapers. The professional beauty had not been invented in those days, nor indeed was she known till long after. There were not even any photographs to speak of, and books of beauty had died out. It was an unusually safe moment for the lovely face that did not want exhibition. She was the Scotch beauty, which was distinction enough. Her sweet complexion, her fair locks, too fair to be golden, the dazzling freshness of her altogether, were identified with

her country in a way which perhaps neither Margaret nor Jean fully appreciated. They were both themselves brown-haired and rather pale, and they were of opinion that their own complexion was quite as distinctively Scotch, though not so beautiful as the other. When it became the fashion to praise her accent and her little Scotticisms, Margaret and Jean were much irritated. They were very much attached to their country, but they were fondly convinced that no shade of peculiarity or provincialism was to be found in Lilias, whose English they considered perfect, far more perfect than that generally spoken in London. When some unwise person spoke of the 'whiff of the heather,' the sisters took it as an offence. But, with this small exception, everything went to their wishes, and more than to their hopes. Margaret, who had prepared herself at least a dozen times to do final battle with Lewis, and show him conclusively, as she had threatened at first, that 'he would make nothing by it,' was almost disappointed that he provoked no explanation, and never indeed thrust himself upon them except in society, where he was their good genius. Was this a policy so astute that her simple wisdom was scarcely capable of understanding

it? or was it that he had thought better of his suit, and meant to give up an effort so hopeless? This last supposition did not perhaps bring so much pleasure with it as Margaret would have wished. For in fact she had rather looked forward to the final battle and trial of strength, and did not feel satisfied to think that she was to be allowed to walk over the field.

CHAPTER VII.

'I DO not ask what you are doing or how you are doing it—I am only asking if you are making progress, which is the great thing. No doubt they will be seeing everybody in London, and, though she is not to call a great heiress, she is a beautiful person—and an old castle in Scotland, though it's much the worse for wear, is always something. There's a romance about it. You may have one of those long-leggit English fellows against ye before ever you are aware.'

Mr. Allenerly too identified the strapping youths who have nothing else in particular to recommend them as the long-legged order. Perhaps he had taken it from Margaret. He was in London, as he said, upon business, but also with a view to such sober-minded amusement as a play, a night or two in the House of Commons when a Scotch bill was in progress (which occurred sometimes in those days), and a dinner or two with Scotch members at their

clubs. He had come to see Lewis before going to pay his respects, as it was his duty to do, at Cadogan Place.

'I am afraid I have made little progress,' said Lewis. 'Miss Margaret is as unfavourable to me as ever. I think she expects me to speak to her again; but what is the good? She has steeled her heart against me. We have seen a good deal of each other in society—and I do not think she dislikes me; but she will not give in, and what is the use of a struggle——'

'Then *you* are giving in? Do you mean to tell me that? throwing up your arms for two old maids——'

'I will not have my dear ladies spoken of so —I throw up no arms. If I do not succeed, it will not be my fault.'

There was a faint smile about Lewis' mouth, a dreamy pleasure which diffused itself over his face, and seemed to dim his eyes, like a cloud just bursting, with the sunshine beyond it, and no darkness in it at all.

'I see, I see,' said the lawyer, and he began to sing, in a jolly bass voice a little the worse for wear—

"He speered na her faither, he speered na her mither,
He speered na at ane of her kin,
But he speered at the bonnie lass hersel',
And did her favour win."

'That is the best road in the long run,' Mr. Allenerly said.

'When it is successful,' said Lewis, with a grimace which was partly comic and partly very serious. 'Every way is the best way when it succeeds.'

'But you have never told me how you got rid of the other: how you got out of that mistake you made. It was a terrible mistake that first try——'

Mr. Allenerly had a broad grin on his face. He had every respect for the Murkley ladies, whom he had known all their lives. They were considerably younger than he was, and he did not yet care to call himself an old man; but the joke of a proposal to Miss Jean was one which no masculine virtue could withstand.

'I did not get rid of her at all,' said Lewis, with gravity; 'if you will understand it, Mr. Allenerly, I am deeply attached to Miss Jean, and when you smile at my friend it hurts me. There is no room for smiling. She was more gentle even than to refuse, she prevented me. After I have told you my foolish presumption, it is right that you should know the end of the story: and that is, it makes me happy to tell you, that we are dear friends.'

The lawyer kept eyeing the young man while

he spoke, with a sarcastic look; and, though he was by no means sure that Miss Jean's position had been so dignified as was thus represented, he felt, at least, that Lewis' account of it was becoming and worthy.

'You speak like a gentleman,' he said, 'and I have always felt that you acted like a gentleman, Mr. Lewis. And, this being so, it just surprises me that in one thing, and only one thing, you have come a little short. You took pains to warn Miss Margaret that you were seeking her little sister, and that was well done; and you went away when she told you frankly she disapproved: which was also fit and right.'

'Pardon,' said Lewis, with a smile, 'I was not perhaps so good. I went away when I heard they were going away. But always with the intention of using the English method whenever I should have the chance.'

'What do you call the English method? It is no more English than Scotch,' said the lawyer, with some indignation. 'That is, "speering the bonnie lass hersel'"? It is, maybe, the best way; but still, having informed the parents, or those that stood in place of the parents, it would seem to me that what you owe them is a full confidence, not half and half. Being the real gentleman you are——'

'You think so? I am very glad you are of that mind. It perplexes me sometimes what is the meaning of the word. There are many things which gentlemen permit themselves to do. But you are more experienced than I am. You understand it.'

'I hope so,' said Mr. Allenerly, 'and a real gentleman you have proved, if just not in one small particular, Mr. Lewis. I call you by the name you have most right to. You should have let Miss Margaret know who you are.'

Lewis looked at him with a startled air.

'Do you think so?' he said. 'But then there would have been no hope for me,' he added, with simplicity.

'That should be of no consequence in comparison with what was right. You see,' said the lawyer, with true enjoyment, 'that is just the difference between your foreign ways and what you call the English method. We think nothing amiss here of a young man "speerin' the bonnie lass hersel'." It is natural, as, after all, she is the person most concerned. But what we cannot away with,' said Mr. Allenerly, 'is any sort of mystery, even when it's quite innocent, about a man's name or his position, or what we call his identity. There's no social crime like going under a false name.'

Lewis' countenance had grown longer and longer under this address. He grew pale; there was no question on which he was so susceptible.

'But,' he cried, with a guilty flush of colour, 'it is not a false name. It was his wish, his last wish, that I should take it. If I wavered, it was that I was sick at my heart. I did not care. In such circumstances a false name—— That is what cannot be said. It is a wrong,' he said, vehemently, 'to me.'

'You may be justified in taking the name,' said the lawyer, 'but not in using it, which is what I complain of, with intention to deceive.'

Never culprit was more self-convicted than Lewis. His courage abandoned him altogether.

'If this is so, then I am a—a thing which I will not name.'

'You are just a young man not wiser than your kind, and that has made a mistake: and I think it has done more harm than good. Margaret Murray, she cannot get it out of her head that, being of no kent Murrays, no name that you could give her, you are not only no Murray at all, which is true enough, but just a sort of upstart, a deceiver——'

'Which is true also,' said Lewis, looking at him with eyes that were very pathetic and wist-

ful, 'if she thought badly of me in what you call my false appearance, they all thought more badly of myself. Perhaps you did so also. They described me as a designing person, upstart, as you say, that wheedled an old man into making me his heir. Now that you know me, you know a little if that was true: but they thought so all of them. Should I have gone and said, "Here am I, this deceiver, this cheat, this dependent that took a base advantage of his benefactor. Behold me, I have robbed you of your money. I have cajoled your father"!'

'I would not have done it quite in that way; it would have been unnecessary. I would have described it all without excitement. Excitement is always a pity. I would have explained, and let them see how a man's motives can be misrepresented, and how little you knew of what was going on. If you had done so, you would have been in a better position now.'

Lewis paused long over this, pondering with troubled face. 'You never,' he said, 'told me so before.'

'I never had the chance. You had settled your mode of action, and were known to all the village before I ever heard you were in Scotland; and then what could I say?—I hoped you would perhaps give it up.'

'I shall never give it up,' cried Lewis, 'till it is quite beyond all hope.'

'Which you think it is not now? But, my young friend, just supposing that you are right, and that the young lady herself should decide for you, which she is no doubt quite capable of doing. In that case there would come a moment, you will allow, in which all would have to be explained.'

The countenance of Lewis grew brighter; a little colour flushed over it.

'But then—' he said, and stopped: for he could not tell to another all the visions that had been in his mind as to the new champion he should have, the advocate whose mouth was more golden than that of any orator to those before whom his cause would have to be pleaded. Of this he would say nothing; but his abrupt breaking off was eloquent. Mr. Allenerly was opaque neither in one way nor the other; he had some mind and some feeling. He caught a portion of the meaning with which Lewis was musing over.

'I see,' he said. 'You would have some one, then, some one who would be very potent to stand your friend. I do not doubt the importance of that; but the straightforward way——'

Here Lewis sprang up from his chair with an impatience unusual with him. Mr. Allenerly paused till the quick movement was over, and then he continued, quietly,

'The straightforward way would be now, this very moment, to go and tell your story, and abide—whatever the consequences might be. You will have to do it one day. You should do it before, and not after, another person is involved.'

In all his life Lewis had never had such a problem to solve. In the face of success so probable that, but for the reverence of true feeling, which can never be certain of its own acceptance, and his sense of the wonderfulness of ever having belonging to him that foundation of all relationship, the love which means everything, he would almost have ventured to be sure—to throw himself back again, to undo all his former building, to present himself under a different light, in the aspect of one not indifferent, but hated, not a stranger, but one who had done them cruel wrong—was very hard to think of. It seemed to him that even Jean would forsake him, that Lilias, just trembling on the point of throwing herself into his arms, would turn from him with loathing,

would flee from him, rejecting his very name with horror. Was it possible for a man to risk all this? And for what? For mere verbal faithfulness, for the matter-of-fact truth which would in reality be falsehood so far as he was concerned, which would convey not a true, but an erroneous, representation of him to their minds. Never had he even thought of so violent a step, one that would open all the question again, and lose him all the standing he had gained. If it had been done perhaps at first —but, now that things had gone so far, why should it be done? The question was debated between the two men until the heart of Lewis was sick with undesired conviction. Mr. Allenerly, to whom it was a matter of business, and who was an entirely unemotional person, had, it need not be said, the best of the argument. He held to his point without swerving; he was very friendly, but a little contemptuous perhaps of the excitement and trouble of Lewis, concluding in his heart that it was his foreign breeding, and that an Englishman (but, to Mr. Allenerly, even an Englishman was *tant soit peu* foreign), if ever he could have fallen into such an unlikely situation, would have taken care at least not to betray his emotion. The conclusion, however, which they came to at last was that

this one evening, almost the last before the ladies left town, and which Lewis was to spend in their company, should be left to him—an indulgence of which Mr. Allenerly did not approve; but that after this the matter should be left in the lawyer's hands, and he should be entrusted with a full explanation of everything to lay before Margaret. With this he went away grumbling, shaking his head, but in his heart very pitiful, and determined so to fight his young client's battles that Miss Margaret, were she as obstinate as a personage whom Mr. Allenerly called the old gentleman, should be compelled to yield; and Lewis was left to prepare for his last night.

His last night! His mind was in so great a state of agitation when Mr. Allenerly left him that he could not settle to anything. At last he had to look in the face an explanation which he saw now must be made, in case his hopes were realised, which he had always pushed from him as unnecessary, or rather had never thought of at all since the first days when he had been in dread of discovery, and when the mere consciousness of a secret had made him uncomfortable. But it was long since he had got over that. And all through he tried to console himself, he had told no lie. He had been rash even

in his statements. Had anyone put two and three together, he might have been unmasked at any moment. In the entire absence of suspicion, he had talked about his life abroad, his old godfather, from whom his name and money had come, as he would have done had he been assuming no disguise. And indeed he had assumed no disguise; but yet he had, as the lawyer had said, that intention to deceive which is the foundation of all lying. And now the end of all this had come; he had not thought of the explanation that must be made at the end.

He had thought of carrying away his bride like the Lord of Burleigh, with no clearing up of matters until perhaps he should bring her home to her own great palace all decked and garnished, and shown to her the realization of all her dreams. Alas! he saw now that this could not be. The heiress of Murkley could not be wedded so lightly. Was it possible that he had never realised the settlements, the laying open of all things, the unveiling of every mystery? Perhaps it was because he had not thought of anything material in respect to Lilias, of anything but the permission to love her and to serve her, the hope of having her for his own, his companion, the epitome and representative

of all loves and relationships. This had been enough to fill all his being; he had thought of nothing more; behind there was the dark shadow of an interview with Margaret to throw up the glory of the sunshine; but he had thought that when he went to Margaret with the news that Lilias loved him, though she might struggle, it would be but a passing struggle. They would not resist the love, the wish of Lilias. There would be a painful interview, and it was likely enough he would have need of all his patience to brave the bitter things that Margaret would say. But what could they do against Lilias? They would give in; and Lewis would have done nothing dishonourable, he would only have done what was justified by the usages of the country, what was so far justified by Nature—what the best in England declared to be the best way. It had been his intention for a long time to risk the final question tonight. He had put it off that none of his proceedings might be hurried or secret. He had given Margaret full warning. When she declared that pure selfishness was to be her rule, he had claimed it also for his. She had no right to expect, after the severe repulse he had received at her hands, that he would go to her again—at

least, until he had tried his fortune at first hand from Lilias herself. And he meant to do so on this last night.

It is scarcely possible not to stray into the conventional when such words are the text. They have been as fruitful of truism as ever words were. But truism and conventional phrases now and then gain a certain glorification from circumstances, and Lewis went to his ball that night with all that had ever been said on the subject buzzing in his mind. The last! it must bring a pang with it, even if it were to be followed by higher happiness—the last of all those meetings which had divided his life, which had been the points of happiness in it, the only hours in the twenty-four that were of any particular importance. How sweet they had been! sometimes, indeed, crossed by awful shadows of tall heroes, with languishing eyes, exactly like (though fortunately he did not know this) the hero of Lilias' dreams. These shadows had crossed his path from time to time, filling his soul with pangs of envy and hatred; but the tall heroes had come to nothing. Either they had obliterated themselves, having other affairs in hand, or Lilias had put them quickly out of their pain, and she had always turned back to

himself with a smile, always been ready to welcome him, to look to him for little services. Was she, perhaps, too confiding, too smiling, too much at her ease with him altogether, considering him more as a brother than a lover? This fear would now and then cross his mind, chilly like a breath of winter, but next time he would catch a glance of her eyes which made his heart leap, or would see her watch him when he was apart from her, as she watched no one else. But this gave him an exhilaration against which prudence had no power. And now this was the last time, and it must be decided once for all what was to come of it. Something must come of it, either the downfall of all his dreams, or something far more delightful, happy, and brilliant than the finest society could give. He had looked forward to this climax since ever the time of the ladies' departure had become visible, so to speak. At first a month or six weeks seemed continents of time; but when these long levels dwindled to the speck of a single week, it had become apparent to Lewis that he must delay no longer. He would have liked to say what he had to say in the woods of Murkley, in some corner full of freshness and verdure, in the silence and quiet of Nature. To say it in a

corner of a ball-room, with the vulgar music blaring and the endless waltz going on, was a kind of profanation. But there was no help for it, He had waited till the last day, and he had arranged the very spot, the best that could be found in such a scene, the shade of a little thicket of palms in a conservatory where there was little light, and where only *habitués* knew the secrets of the place. It had been before his mind's eye for days and nights past. The cool air full of perfumes, the Oriental leafage, the shaded light, the sounds of revelry coming faint from the distance. He would take Lilias there under pretence of showing her something, and, when they had reached this innermost hermitage, what if the thing he had to show her was his heart?

So Lewis had planned. He had been full of it all the morning. It seemed to run into his veins and brim them over. It was not that he was planning what to say, but that the theme was so strong in him that it said itself over and over, like a song he was singing. And that Mr. Allenerly, and his trenchant advice, his disapproval, his suggestion that filled Lewis with panic, his almost determination not to leave the matter where it was, should fall upon him pre-

cisely at this moment, was like the very spite of fate. Had the lawyer appeared before, or had he come after, one way or other, it was over—there would have been no particular importance in him; but that it should happen now!—no interruption could have been more ill-timed. It checked his *élan* at the moment of all others when he wanted his courage. It chilled him when he was at the boiling point. Lewis did his utmost to throw off the impression while he dined and prepared for the crisis. He had chosen to dine alone, that nothing might disturb him, but the feverish anticipation which was in him was so much twisted and strained by the lawyer's ill-starred appearance that he was sorry he had not company to deliver him from himself and the too great pressure of his thoughts.

At last the moment came. He felt himself to change colour like a girl, now red, now white, as he set out for the ball, late because his heart had been so early. He did not know how he was to get through the first preliminaries of it, the talking and the dancing, until the time should come when he could find a pretext to lead Lilias away. The programme was nearly half through before he got into the room, where, after an anxious inspection, he saw his three

judges, his fates, the ladies of Murkley, all standing together. Lilias was not dancing; she was looking, he thought, a little *distraite.* He stood and watched her from the doorway, and saw her steal one or two long anxious looks through the crowd. The sisters, he thought, looked grave—was it that Allenerly had not respected their bargain, that he had gone at once to make the threatened explanation? Lewis lingered gazing at them in the distance, racking his soul with questions which he might no doubt have solved at once. All at once he saw the countenance of Lilias light up; her face took a cheerful glow, her eyes brightened, the smile came back to her lip. Was this because she had seen him? He could not help feeling so, and a warm current began to flow back into his heart. She seemed to tell her sisters, and they, too, looked, Miss Jean waving her hand to him, and even Miss Margaret more gracious than her wont. How often a little gleam like this, too bright to last, fictitious even in its radiance, comes suddenly over the world before a storm! He made his way towards them, ignoring the salutations of his friends. When he reached them, Margaret herself, who generally used but scant courtesy to him, was the first to speak.

'We thought you were not coming,' she said, 'and I fear you have not been well. You're looking pale.'

'Dear me, Margaret, he is looking anything but pale—he has just a beautiful colour,' Miss Jean said, giving him her hand.

And then he felt that Margaret looked at him with interested eyes—with eyes that were almost affectionate.

'I do not like changes like that,' she said. 'I am afraid you are not well, and all this heat and glare is not good for you.'

It had the strangest effect upon Lewis that she should speak to him as if it mattered to her whether he was ill or well. Even with Lilias' hand in his, he was touched by it. His heart smote him that he was not fighting fair. Surely she was an antagonist worthy to be met with a noble and unsullied glaive. He could not help giving her a warning even at the last moment.

'You are very good to think of me,' he said. 'It is the mind, not the body. I have had a great deal to think of.' Surely a clever woman could understand that. Then he turned to Lilias. 'This is the dance you promised me,' he said.

Nothing could be more audacious or more

untrue, but she acquiesced without a question. She had scarcely danced all the evening. Some wave from his excessive emotion had touched Lilias. She scarcely knew that she was thinking of him, but she was preoccupied, restless. She had told the others that she was tired, that this last evening she meant to look on. How deeply she, too, felt that it was the last evening! There was thunder in the air—something was coming—she knew it, though she could not tell what it was. But, when he came to her, she remembered no more her previous refusal, her plea of being tired. She went away with him without a thought of what everybody would say, of the visible fact that she had rejected everybody till his approach. She ought to have known better, and indeed Margaret and Jean ought to have known better, and to have interfered. But they were simple women, notwithstanding their season in town, which had taught them so much; and they were moved by a sort of vibration of the excitement round them. Lewis affected them, though he was unaware of it, and though they had not known till this moment that any change had taken place in him, or any momentous decision been made.

The young pair danced a little, but he

was not capable of this amount of self-denial.

'Do you want to dance very much?' he said. 'Then let us go and find a quiet corner, and rest.'

'That is what I should like,' said Lilias, though she had said to her other suitors that she wanted to look on. 'I am tired too. I never thought I should have had as many balls in my life.'

'It is not the balls we have had—but the thought that this is the last which troubles me.'

'Yes,' said Lilias, 'it is a little strange. So long as it has been; and then all to come to an end. But everything comes to an end,' she added, after a moment. A more trite reflection could not be; but Shakespeare, they both felt, could not have said anything more profoundly and touchingly true.

'Come into the conservatory,' he said. 'It is cool; and there will be nobody there.'

Lilias raised no objection. She liked the idea that there would be nobody there. She was quite ready to be talked to, ready to declare that quiet conversation was, in certain cases, preferable to dancing. It was because they had both danced so much, Lilias supposed.

Heaven and earth! He was so much disappointed, so much irritated, that he could have

taken the young fellow by the shoulders and turned him out, when the tittering girl would no doubt have followed. To think that a couple of grinning idiots should have occupied that place, chatterers who had nothing to say to each other that might not have been said in the fullest glare of the ball-room. Lewis was annoyed beyond description. That secret corner commanded every part of the conservatory, though it was itself so sheltered. He could not walk about with Lilias, and tell her his tale under the spying of these two young fools, to whom an evident courtship would have been a delightful amusement. He was so disturbed that he could not conceal it from Lilias, who looked at him with a little anxiety, and asked,

'Are you really ill, as Margaret says?'

'I am not ill, only fretted to death. I wanted to put you in that chair, and talk to you. Does Margaret really take any interest whether I am ill or not?'

'Oh, a great deal of interest! She thinks it her duty sometimes to look severe, but there is no one that has a tenderer heart.'

'But not to me. She never liked me.'

'Oh, how can you say so!' Lilias cried. 'She likes you—just as much as the rest.'

Lewis was annoyed more than it was possible to say by the appropriation of his hermitage. And now the unexpected discovery that he was an object of interest to Margaret caught him, as it were, by the throat.

'As much—' he said, with a sigh, 'and as little. Will anyone remember after you have been gone a week?'

'I suppose,' said Lilias, 'that you will still be dancing and dining, and driving about to Richmond, and going everywhere—for much longer than that, till the season is well over.'

'I don't know what I may do,' he said, disconsolately. 'That does not depend upon me. But, if I do, it will be without my heart.'

Lilias felt a great strain and commotion in her own bosom, but she achieved a little laugh.

'Do you always say that when people you know are going away?'

He was angry, he was miserable, he did not know what he was saying. Providence, if it was fair to connect those two idiots with any great agency, had prevented him. His programme of action seemed to be destroyed. He could not answer this little provocation with any of those prefaces of the truth which would so soon have brought everything to a crisis

had they been seated together under the palms. He said, almost sharply, which was so unlike Lewis,

'You must go away; that is a little soil of society. You would not have said so at Murkley last year.'

'Mr. Murray!' cried Lilias.

The tears came suddenly to her eyes. It was as if he had struck her in the melting of her heart. She made a gulp to get down a little sudden sob, like a child that has been met with an unexpected check. And then she said, softly,

'I do not think I meant it,' with a look of apology and wonder, though it was he who ought to have apologised. But he did not; he pressed her hand close to his side almost unconsciously.

'Do you remember,' he cried, 'that lovely morning—was there ever such a morning out of heaven? The river and the birds just waking, and you standing in the bow—— If it could but have lasted——'

'It lasted long enough,' said Lilias, with an effort. 'It began to get cold; and Katie whispering, whispering. You never said a word all the time.'

Again he pressed her hand to his side.

'And I cannot say a word now,' he said. 'Let us go back and dance, or do something that is foolish; for to think of that is too much. And Margaret takes an interest in me! I wish she had not looked at me so kindly. I wish you had not told me that.'

'I think you are a little crazy to-night,' Lilias said.

Was there a touch of disappointment in her tone? Had she too thought that something would come of it? And the last night was going, was gone—and nothing had come. Heaven confound Allenerly and all such! And Margaret to take an interest in him! But for that lawyer, Margaret's interest would have encouraged Lewis. Now it achieved his overthrow. He was busy about them all the night, making little agitated speeches to one and another, but he did not again attempt to find the seat vacant under the palms in the conservatory. He gave up his happier plans, his hopes with an inward groan. Whatever was to be done now, must be done in the eye of the day.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARGARET was in the act of adding up her bills, and counting the expenses of the season, next morning when Mr. Allenerly was shown into the room. She rose from her chair, and gave him a warm welcome; for he was not only their 'man of business,' but an old friend of the family. She asked after his belongings, and if Scotland stood where it did, as is the use of compatriots when they meet in a strange country, and then she said, though not without a certain keen glance of curiosity,—for the visit of your man of business may always have something important lying under it, however innocent it appears,—

'You will just have come to this great big Vanity Fair of a place to divert yourself, like the rest of us?'

'A little of that—and a little thought of business too. Lawyers have such an ill name that

it is difficult to make the world believe we take sometimes a great interest in our clients, and like to look after them. But my diversion would never be like yours. I hear there has been nothing but triumph in your career.'

'Triumph! That is another question. You must have a great deal of money, and not much sentiment, I should say, to make a triumph in London—but we were not thinking of anything of that kind. We have had some very pleasant society, and that is as much as we wanted.'

'I know what that means,' said Mr. Allenerly. 'I have heard of Miss Lilias; that there is nothing talked about but the young Scots' beauty, and all the conquests she has made.'

'Toot!' said Margaret; and then she melted a little. 'Everybody has been very kind. And we have seen a great deal—more than I ever expected, such quiet people as we are. But as for triumph, that is a large word. Whatever it has been, it has not turned her head.'

'There is too much sense in it for that,' said the lawyer.

'The sense in a young person's head of her age is never much to be trusted to. But she just takes everything, the monkey, as if she had

a right to it, and that is a greater preservation than sense itself.'

'I am thinking,' said Mr. Allenerly, 'that, after having all those grandees at her feet, it will be ill to please her with a plain Scots lad.'

Miss Margaret gave him another keen look, but, though she had a great deal of curiosity herself as to his meaning, she did not intend to satisfy his curiosity. She laughed, accepting the inference, though turning over in her mind at the same time the question what Scots lad the lawyer could be thinking of. Not long-leggit Philip, it was to be hoped!

'There is no hurry,' she said, 'for any decision of that kind.'

'There is no hurry on her side,' said Mr. Allenerly, 'but on the other there is generally a wish for an answer. So that I was thinking— But you will stop me, if there is any absolute bar in the way of what I was going to take upon me to say.'

He looked at her with much keenness of inspection too, and their eyes met like two rival knights, without much advantage on either hand.

'I can scarcely do that,' said Miss Margaret, 'till I know what it is you are going to say.'

Mr. Allenerly was tolerably satisfied by these preliminaries. Had there been any approaching brilliant marriage for Lilias, it must have been somehow revealed to him. He said,

'I am going to refer to events in the past that were painful at the time. Things have come to my knowledge that have made me wishful to interfere. There is a person who was once, without any will of his, an instrument of wrong to this family.'

'Dear me, that is a very serious beginning,' Miss Margaret said.

'And it will be more serious before the end. I am not going to beat about the bush with you. You are too well informed and have too much judgment to take up a thing hastily. You will remember, Miss Margaret, all the vexation and trouble there was about your grandfather's will.'

'Remember it! I would have a short memory or an easy mind if I did not remember all about it. It is not three years since.'

'That is true; and there was a great deal of vexation. Such a thing, when it arises in a family, just spreads trouble.'

'I don't know what you call vexation—that's an easy word. It was just burning wrong, and injustice, and injury. There was nothing in it

that was not hateful to think upon and bitter to bear. I wonder that anyone who wishes well to the family should be able to speak of it in that way.'

'And yet I have been one that has wished well to the family—for more years than I care to reckon,' the lawyer said.

'Grant me your pardon, Mr. Allenerly! I try to put it out of my mind as a Christian woman should; but, when I think of it, I just lose my patience. Vexation! it was just a bitter wrong and shame all the ways of it, both to him that gifted it and us that lost it.'

'That is all true—it is all true: and nobody would suspect me of making little of it. At the same time, Miss Margaret, I will own that there was one part of the story that I was deceived in. The young man that wrongously got this inheritance——'

'The favourite, the foreign swindler.'

'That is just where we were deceived,' cried the lawyer, hastily throwing up his hand as if to stop the invective. 'The young man—— Miss Margaret, if you will have a little patience! Am I one to be easily convinced, or without chapter and verse? You have called me a bundle of prejudice before now. I am fond of

nothing foreign; an intriguer is just what I cannot abide. Well, but this young man was neither foreign nor a swindler. He was not to blame. I declare it to you, if it was my dying word—he was not to blame.'

Miss Margaret got up, and began to pace the little room in great excitement. It was the little back room attached to the dining-room, and was very small. She was like a lion in a cage. She put up her hand, and turned away from him with an expression of resentment and scorn.

'That is a likely thing to say to me!'

'It is not an easy thing to say to you—you will grant that; but it is true. He was young, and had been taken by Sir Patrick from a child; he was an orphan and friendless. He knew nothing about the Murrays. He did not even know that his benefactor had any children. He gave up the best of his life to nursing and tending the old man. A woman could not have been kinder. He expected nothing; when he heard what had happened, that he was the heir, he thought it would at most be to all the nicknacks and the gimcracks. He was thunderstruck when he knew what it was. I was on the lookout for deceptions, and I thought this was one.

I will not deny it, I was of your opinion. You are not taking any notice of what I say.'

'On the contrary,' said Miss Margaret, with a laugh of disdain, 'I am taking the greatest notice of it. And how did you come to change your opinion? He must be a clever fellow, this person, to get over a Scotch writer too.'

'It is not so easy to get over a Scotch writer, as you say,' said Mr. Allenerly, wiping his forehead. 'What got over me was just experience of the lad. I have had a great deal to do with him. What with letters and what with observation, I've come to know him. It is not that he's difficult to know. It was all in him at the first glance, but I could not believe it. I thought it was certain he must be a deceiver. But he is no deceiver. He is more simple than the generality. You will believe me or you will not believe me, as you please; but what I am saying is true.'

'It would be impossible for me not to believe—that you are speaking what you think the truth—just as impossible,' said Miss Margaret, 'as it is to believe that this is the truth. Was the old man doited then? was he mad? had he lost every sense of what was due to those that came after him? Then why did not you, a man

of the law like you, prove him so? This was what I never understood, for my part.'

'He was neither mad nor doited, but knew what he was doing well, or, you may be sure, if there had been any proof——There was no undue influence; the young man did not so much as know what there was to leave, or if there was a will at all.'

'This is a very likely story,' said Margaret, with a grim smile, 'and I acknowledge, at all events, that there is a kind of genius in making you believe it all.'

The lawyer gave her a look of indignation and anger, but restrained himself with professional power.

'The General,' he said—'you will forgive me, Miss Margaret: far be it from me to say a word to his disadvantage—but he was not what you would call a dutiful son. There was no question of that, you will say, at his age—which is true enough. And Sir Patrick had been long abroad, and none of you had ever gone near him, or showed any interest in him.'

'How could we?' cried Margaret, roused to instant self-defence. 'Was it our part? We were women, never stirring from home. If he had held up a finger—if he had given us the least invitation——

'And, on the other hand, why should he?' said the lawyer. 'He had a kind of son of his old age that had no thought but his comfort. Why should he put himself out of the way to invite his grandchildren, that cared nothing about him? If he had known you and your sister, or if he had seen that bonnie creature, Miss Lilias——'

'I am glad,' cried Margaret, vehemently, 'that we were never beguiled to travel all that long way and put ourselves and Lilias into competition with the wriggling creature you call the son of his old age—I am thankful for that with all my heart.'

'Then you will pardon me for saying you are thankful for small mercies,' the lawyer said, in an indignant tone. They paused, both eyeing each other for the moment with equal displeasure and breathing quick with excitement. 'There seems but small encouragement,' said Mr. Allenerly, with that air of compassionate resignation which is so irritating to an antagonist, 'for the rest that I had to say; for, if you will not listen to the first part of my story, it is very unlikely that you will put up with the second.'

'Oh, say on, say on!' said Miss Margaret, with an affectation of calm. She went into the next

room through the folding doors, and brought back her knitting, and seated herself with a serene air of resignation in the one easy chair which the room contained. 'I would like to hear the whole,' she said, with a smile, 'now that we are on the subject. It is a pity to miss anything. If I were what they call a student of human nature, it would be just a grand amusement. A clever man, and an Edinburgh writer, and a person of judgment, telling me what's neither more nor less than a fairy tale.'

'It is God's truth,' said Mr. Allenerly, sternly, 'and I dare any man to prove me mistaken; but the rest, you are right, it is like a fairy tale. This young man, finding, after his first astonishment at being a rich man (he was astonished to be rich, but not that his old friend, his protector, his godfather, as he called him, had made a will in his favour, which was the most natural thing——)'

'His—what did he call him?' Margaret said, with a start, looking up.

'His godfather—that was the name of kindness between them.'

A gleam of fierce light came over Margaret's face. She threw down her knitting and clasped her hands forcibly together.

'Ah!' she cried, in the tone of one upon whom a sudden light has been thrown; then she said, 'Go on! go on!' with an angry smile.

'I say he was sorely astonished, overcome at first, and it took him a long time to accustom himself to it. He knew nothing about any relations, and, when he was told of their existence, you'll excuse me for saying that he would not believe in them—saying, as was quite natural, that nobody ever came near the old man, that he was quite alone in the world. But we have already discussed that question. I let him know, however, that it was true, and it made a great impression on him. For one thing, it wounded him in his love for old Sir Patrick: for, after hearing that, he could not regard him as just the perfect being he had supposed.'

'That was a very delicate distress, Mr. Allenerly,' Margaret said, with fine sarcasm.

'He had a very delicate mind, as you shall see,' said the lawyer, equally caustic. 'The second thing was that he conceived a grand idea of setting the wrong right. He heard that the heirs were all ladies, and his determination was taken in a moment—it was without any thought of pleasing himself, or question whether they were old or young—just to come to

Scotland and offer himself to one of them.'

Margaret rose from her seat with a start of energy. She flung her knitting from her in the fervour of her feelings.

'There is no need to say any more,' she cried, vehemently, 'not another word. I know who your friend is now. I know who he is. Lord in heaven! that I should have been one of the credulous too!'

'If you know who he is, there is the less need——'

'Not another word,' she cried, putting up her hand, 'not another word. To think that I should have been taken in too! Oh! I see it all now. I might have thought what was the motive that made him so keen after one of us. Jean first, and, when that would not do, Lilias. Lilias! as if I would give my child, my darling, the apple of my eye, to a man of straw, a man of nothing, a man that has just *her* money and nothing more. And so that was what it was! and me trying to find out what Murrrays he was come of. Man!' she cried, turning upon the lawyer with a movement which resembled the stamping of her foot in passion. 'Oh, man! why did you let me be humbled so?'

'Miss Margaret!—is that all you will say?'

'What more is there to say? I am humbled to the dust—I am just proved a fool, which is a bitter thing for a woman to put up with. I have had him in my house. I have let him come and go. I have accepted favours at his hands. Lord!' cried Miss Margaret again, in passionate excitement, clasping her hands together, 'it is all his doing. I see it now. It is just all his doing. It is he that brought these fine folk here. He got the invitations for us that he might meet her. He has been at the bottom of everything. And I—I have been a fool—a fool! and would never have seen through it till doomsday, and was getting to be fond of—Oh!' she cried, stamping her foot on the ground, unable to contain herself, 'is this me, Margaret, that have always had such an opinion of myself? and now I am just humbled to the ground!'

'There is little occasion for being humbled—if you never do anything less wise——'.

'Hold your tongue, sir,' she cried; 'oh! hold your tongue. It has been a scheme, a plot, a conspiracy from the beginning. I see through it all now. Mr. Allenerly, I beg your pardon. If I am ill-bred to you, it is just that there is more than I can bear!'

'Be as ill-bred as you please, if that is any

ease to you; but, Miss Margaret, be just. You are a just woman. Oh! think what you are doing. You are not one to give way to a sudden passion.'

'I am just one to give way to passion! What else should I do? Would you have me to take it like a matter of business, or, maybe, thank your friend for his good intentions,' she cried, with a laugh of anger. They both belonged to a race and class which forbids such demonstrations of feeling; but righteous wrath is always exempted from the range of those sentiments which are to be kept under control.

While this interview was going on, Lewis was passing through a strange revolution, a sort of volcanic crisis such as had never happened in his life before. He had not been trained to thought, nor was that his tendency. He had all his life taken things as they came: *au jour le jour* had been his simple philosophy, a maxim which may be the most sublime Christianity or the most reckless folly. In his case it was neither, but rather the easy temperament of a simple nature, always able to reconcile itself to the circumstances of the moment, finding more or less enjoyment in everything that happened, and very little pre-occupied with its own per-

sonality at all. A prudent young man would have been concerned as to what was to happen to him after Sir Patrick's death, when his luxurious home would be broken up, and he himself, without profession or property, thrown upon the world; but Lewis had given the matter no thought at all, with an easy confidence of always finding bread and kindness, which both the circumstances of his life and the disposition of his friends had fostered. Afterwards, when he found himself Sir Patrick's heir and a man of fortune, he accepted that too with surprise, but an easy reconciliation of all confused matters, which, had he contemplated the subject in all its lights, would have been impossible. It was only by degrees that he woke to the other side of the question, the position of the despoiled heirs. Then, the reader of this history is aware, his resolution had been uncompromising. He had not thought of his own satisfaction at all. Having come to the decision that Sir Patrick's heiress, or at least one of Sir Patrick's heiresses, should have back the inheritance in the only way that occurred to him as practicable, he had set about it at once in the most straightforward manner possible. He had been ready to subordinate his own feelings, to consider only

the question of duty. In every way that had seemed possible to him he had pursued this object. When it happened, in pursuit of this duty, that love stepped in, dazzling and bewildering, yet intensifying to the highest degree his previous purpose, it had been a boon from heaven, a blessing upon that purpose rather than a new object. It seemed to him another proof that he was born under a happy star, that the one woman in the world whom he desired to marry should also be the one in the world with whom it was his duty to share everything that was his. It was this that made all methods seem lawful to him, and had stirred him to the intention, which was contrary to all his prejudices, of obtaining, if possible, her assent to his suit, without the previous knowledge or even against the wish of her family—the English way—the way that Philip Stormont and Katie Seton, and indeed everybody about thought legitimate. But now for the first time Lewis had been driven out of his easy philosophy. Mr. Allenerly's stern conception of honour, the new light upon the whole subject that had been thrown by the lawyer's lantern, had found those openings in the young man's mind which a new and deeper sentiment than

any he had ever known had opened in him. The natural affections may be ever so warm and lovely without startling the soul into any new awakening. Full of friendship, full of kindness, he had been all his life more prone to serve and help than even to enjoy: but when a great primary passion, one of the elementary principles of life, goes down into the depths of innocent nature, the effect is different. It is like the Divine life, when that enters into a soul, bringing not peace but a sword.

The year which had elapsed since he left Murkley had been a period of chaos and doubt. He had been without any ray of distinct guidance, looking vaguely to the chances of the future. Since he came to town and had seen Lilias again, his whole mind had been occupied in her service, in devising means for her entertainment and success, but also in securing opportunities for himself, and in conspiring with everybody who knew him, and would help him, for the glorification of his heroine. And in fact, during the most of this period, simple love had carried him away on its current. He had thought of no rational obstacles or difficulties, but only of herself. Her looks, her words, the way in which she took his arm, a glance surprised in the course of an evening had occupied

him to the complete exclusion of everything else. The approach of the critical moment when all must be decided had raised the whole being of Lewis into an atmosphere of passion. The crisis. affected his mind as well as his feelings, and quickened his intelligence as it developed his heart. When that clear, cold lantern of good sense in Mr. Allenerly's hand flashed upon the confused scene, the light effected in an instant what previous months had not effected. He began to see that his own easy way was impossible. It would have been so much happier, so much less complicated! but it was impossible. He could not even, as has been seen, when the moment came, attempt to solve everything in that easy way. Sailing over the surface would do no longer. He had to go down into the heart of things, to question the depths, and see what answer was in them. He began to ask himself what was the question which he had skimmed over from the beginning, which he had so often attempted to settle by natural compromises, by pleasant expedients, as was his nature? When self is imperious in such a nature, necessity brings forth treachery and guile. But to Lewis self was never in the foreground, even in love, where self-will has a kind of justification, and

indulgence has an air of duty; it was not his nature to put it forward, and truth was dear to him wherever he saw it. He began to think, almost for the first time in his life.

And the first result of this process is seldom a pleasant one. When he had put the ladies into their carriage on that last night, or rather morning—for the dawn was blue in the streets, and London was coming slowly into sight out of the darkness, with lamps burning unearthly in a light far more potent than theirs—Lewis put his hat on his head, and set out on a wonderful walk, which he remembered all his life. The market carts, all fresh and alive, and somewhat chilly with their start before the day; the carriages, with a jaded air, horses and people alike, white bundles of drapery huddled up within them, and their lamps flickering like impish eyes; the houses all asleep in long blank lines, closed to every influence; the Park lying dewy and still, without a speck of life upon it, gave a kind of unnatural background, familiar yet strange to his thoughts. It might have been the extraordinary character of these thoughts that had thus altered the aspect of the visible world, in itself so well known. He assisted at the spectacle of the great city's awaking, as he

walked on and on; the parks always lying in the midst of the scene, shut up, and silent, and inaccessible, the early sun sweeping over them unbroken by any human shadow, in the midst of the growing life and motion, like a haven which was not to be attained, the always possible Eden, open to the longing vision, but guarded from the eager step, which tantalises most existences. His mind got only more confused, a greater whirl of imperfect thinking was about him as he hurried along, receiving all these external objects distractedly into the ferment in his brain. It was full day, nearly six o'clock, when he got home, and threw himself on his bed unnaturally in the sunshine. But it was not to sleep. Thinking was so new a process to Lewis that he felt as if some new jarring machinery had been set up in his brain, and the whirl of the unaccustomed wheels made him giddy, and took away all consciousness of mental progress. He seemed to be in the same place, beating a painful round, with the whirl and the movement and confusion, but nothing else, in his bewildered brain. He must have slept, though he was scarcely aware of it, late into the morning. But when he was disturbed by the entrance of his servant, and sprang up

suddenly into full consciousness and life, the first flash of self-recollection revealed to him a resolution formed and perfect. Where had it come from? Had the wheels been working while he slept, and ground it out? had something above earth whispered it to him out of the unseen? He was almost afraid, when he saw it looking him, as it were, in the face, a something separate from himself, a definite thing, resolved and certain. It was not there when he had come in; where had it come from? He sprang up into the consciousness of a new world, a new life, a changed order of things, as well as a new day.

When Mr. Allenerly came in about an hour after, Lewis met him with a pale and somewhat jaded aspect not inappropriate to a man who had been up all night, the lawyer thought, but also subdued and grave as of one whose reflections had not been of a happy kind. The lawyer came in, himself very serious, with the painful sense that his mission was to quash all the hopes and make an end of all the plans which the other had been making himself happy in forming. He sat down at the table on which Lewis' breakfast stood untouched, without a word. The sight of this partly reduced his sympathy

for Lewis, for there was an air of dissipation about it which displeased his orderly mind. Perhaps, notwithstanding all the advantages of the arrangement, a young man who had not breakfasted at twelve o'clock was scarcely a fit husband for Lilias Murray, or one in whose hands her happiness would be sure. He sat down and looked at Lewis with a disapproving eye.

'You are very late,' he said. 'I will soon be thinking of my lunch; but I suppose you were up till all the hours of the night.'

'I don't think I have slept at all,' said Lewis, 'I have been thinking. Stop and hear me first. I know by your face what you are going to say. But that has nothing to do with what I have made up my mind to. One way or other, it could have nothing to do with it. Our talk yesterday turned me all outside in. I never had thought it over from the beginning to the end before.'

'You must form no rash resolution,' Mr. Allenerly said.

'It is the least rash I have ever formed. I suppose I am not given to thinking. And, if it is wrong, it is you who have set me on this way,' Lewis said, with a wistful sort of fatigued smile. 'Now, before you say anything, have patience and hear me out.'

N 2

CHAPTER IX.

THERE were many circumstances to add to the passionate annoyance and irritation with which Margaret became aware of the deception, as she conceived it, of which she had been the victim. She saw now a hundred indications by which she ought to have been able to make sure from the beginning who and what the stranger was: his sudden appearance at Murkley, a place calculated to attract nobody, which even 'those tourist-cattle,' who roused Miss Margaret's wrath, had left out, where nobody came but for the fishing; his anxiety to secure their acquaintance, to recommend himself to them, his suit to Miss Jean, so unlike anything that had ever come in the way of the sisters before, even his conversations, of which she recollected now disjointed scraps and fragments quite enough to have betrayed him. Twice over had he come to her to explain his wishes; the last time, she believed now (though

that was a mistake), that he had meant to confess everything. And she would not listen to him. Well, that was all honest enough; it had not been a wilful attempt to deceive her on his part: but yet she had been completely deceived. How blind she had been! Had it not been plain to every eye but hers? Had the Setons suspected something? Had Jean known anything? Was it possible— Margaret started up and rang the bell with great vehemence. She was so little in the habit of doing this that it brought Simon rushing from below and Susan flying from above, and Miss Jean in consternation to listen at the head of the stairs.

'Is my sister ill?' Jean said, trembling with apprehension.

'She would like if you would go and speak to her, mem,' said Susan, who had outstripped the heavier-footed man. Simon was standing ready to open the door for her into the little room in which Margaret was sitting.

'Is my sister ill?' she asked again.

'I reckon, mem, that something is wrong,' Simon said, in his deliberate voice.

'There is nothing wrong with me,' said Miss Margaret. 'Sit down, sit down, and make no

fuss, if you will not drive me doited: I am well enough. But there is a matter to be cleared up between you and me. Will you tell me frankly, Jean, eye to eye, what you know about this young Murray that has just been haunting our house?'

'About Mr. Murray?' said Jean, looking more guilty than ever criminal looked, innocent guilt faltering and ready to betray itself in every line of her face.

'Just about Mr. Murray. I have said always he was of no kent Murrays—were you in this secret all the time, you, my sister, the other part of me? Oh! Jean, was this well done? I can read it in your face. You were in his secret all the time.'

'Margaret! what do you call his secret?' the culprit said.

She was of the paleness of ashes, and sat twisting her fingers nervously together, feeling her treachery, her untruth to her first allegiance, weigh upon her like something intolerable. Her very eyelids quivered as she stole a glance at Margaret's face.

'Do you mean his secret at Murkley,' poor Miss Jean said, breathless, 'or his secret—here?'

Margaret laughed loud. The tones in this

laugh were indescribable—wrath, and scorn, and derision, and underneath all a pitiful complaint.

'It is evident you are further ben than me, for I know of but one secret,' she said, 'but we'll take them in succession, if you please.'

'Oh! Margaret,' said poor Jean, trembling, 'was there any harm in it? There was harm in me, perhaps, but what in him? For who could see Lilias and not be in love with her? And then, when he saw us in London just a little forlorn, and knowing so few folk, and him that had everybody at his beck and call——'

'Him that had everybody at his beck and call—Yes?—and then? He took pity upon us, and——What are you meaning? Our friends in London,' said Margaret, with dignity, forgetting how she had, by the light of Mr. Allenerly's statement, glimpsed the truth on this point as well as on others, 'are persons we have met at other friends' houses in the ordinary way of society. There was nobody came to me from him, except just perhaps that old duchess who takes you to the music. Your friend's compassion, Jean, I think, might have been spared.'

'Oh, Margaret!' faintly said the accused at the bar.

'What do you mean by "Oh, Margaret"?—is

it not true that I say? What did it advantage us, I ask you, that this young lad had everybody, as you say, at his beck and call?'

Jean gave a deprecatory, wistful glance at her sister, and said nothing—but it was the look of one that had a great deal to say: and there was that mixture of pity in it by which Margaret had been moved to a passing wonder before.

'What did he ever do,' she repeated, scornfully, 'when he saw us, as you say, forlorn in London, and knowing few folk? It is a pretty description, but I cannot recognise it as a picture of me,' Margaret said, with a laugh of resentment. The conviction that had flashed upon her concerning their life in London had been intolerable, and she had pushed it from her. She was ready now to resist to desperation any suggestion that Lewis had served them in society, or been instrumental in opening to them so many fashionable houses. The consciousness in her mind that this was so, gave heat and passion to her determination to ignore it, and gave a bravado of denial to her tone. 'All this,' she added, 'is nothing, nothing to the main subject; but, as we are on it, let us be done with it. What has your friend done for us?—I am at a loss to know.'

Jean was in a terrible strait, and knew not what to do. She was divided between her desire to do justice to Lewis and her desire to save Margaret pain. She hesitated, almost prevaricated in her anxiety, but at last the story burst forth. The Greek ball, the beginning of all, Margaret had firmly believed all along, was a homage to the importance of the Miss Murrays of Murkley, a natural acknowledgment of their claims to be considered. She could not help remembering the change that had occurred in the aspect of affairs from the moment that Lewis had appeared on the scene, but the invitation for which she had wished so much, and the others that flowed from it, Margaret had endeavoured to believe were natural: at least the first—she had always clung to that. But when Jean's story, extracted in fragments, with many a protestation and many an unintended admission, fell upon her ears, the sudden disenchantment was terrible. To think that everything was his doing from beginning to end, that he, this upstart, this minion, this foreign favourite, should have been able to open the doors of fashion to those whom he had so injured and supplanted, whose chief enemy he was! Was it to humiliate them still more, to smite them

down into deeper abasement, to triumph over them in every way? The pang which it gave Margaret was too bitter for speech. There had been an appeal made to him, and in his magnanimity—that easy magnanimity of the conqueror—he had responded to the appeal, and had taken compassion upon them. It was a bitter pill for a proud woman to swallow. Jean had appealed to him, and he had been kind—oh! these were the words. He had been kind to the poor country ladies, and no doubt presented them as originals, out of whom a little amusement could be had, to his fine friends. Margaret would not even tell her sister, with whom she was indignant beyond all possibility (she thought) of forgiveness, what she had heard this morning. Her mortification, her sense of having been tricked and cheated, was too great: the only thing she could think of was to turn her back upon this hated place with all its delusions.

'I am just sick of London,' she said; 'my very heart is sick. Get your packing done this afternoon. I will not spend another day here. I think we will go home to-night.'

'To-night!' cried Jean, with dismay. To oppose a decision of Margaret was impossible, and she felt guilty, and wounded, and miserable,

out of favour, out of heart. But yet to be obliged to cut off her little leave-takings, and not to see him, the cause of all this, the friend who had been so kind, so tender, so eager to carry out all her wishes, was very hard. And even to travel at night was alarming and terrible to Miss Jean: she thought the dangers of the way were doubled by the darkness, and that very likely there would be a railway accident. 'It is very sudden,' she said. 'Oh! Margaret, I know you are ill-pleased at me. I am sorry—sorry! if I have done what was foolish, it was with a good intention; but will you change all our plans just for that, only for that?'

'Only for that!' said Margaret. 'Only for what is burnt in on me in shame, and should on you still more, if you had the heart—to have been indebted to our enemy, to have sought the help of him, if there had not been another man in the world, that should have been the last——'

'Oh! Margaret,' cried poor Miss Jean, 'you are unjust. You are cruel. He is nobody's enemy. You may think him not good enough for Lilias,—for who would seem good enough for Lilias to you and me?—but an enemy he is none. Oh, no enemy, but a friend: or more like a son, a brother.'

Margaret rose with a stern intensity of tone and look that made her sister tremble.

'Do you know who this friend is,' she said, grimly, 'this brother, this lover, this benefactor? His name is not Murray, but Lewis Grantley, a name you have heard before. He is your grandfather's heir. He has gotten the inheritance of Lilias. And now, seeing she is a lovelier thing even than the inheritance, this creature of nothing, this subtile serpent, this prac*tiser* upon an old man's weakness, would have her too.'

Jean had risen also, with eyes full of horror, in the extremity of her astonishment. She lifted her arms, she opened her lips to cry out, but no sound came. She stood an image of dumb consternation and misery gazing at her sister. No doubt of Jean's innocence from all complicity in the secret could be entertained by anyone who saw her. She stood dumb, staring at Margaret for some minutes. Then her breast began to labour with choking sobs.

'Oh! no, no. Oh! no, no—no, no,' she ran on, unable to restrain herself. It was a protest which was pitiful, like the cry of a dumb creature unable to articulate. Hysterics were unknown in the family, and Margaret was alarmed. It subdued her anger in a moment, and

relieved her own oppressed and excited mind by giving her a new subject of concern. She put Jean into the easy-chair, and brought her wine, and soothed her: in the midst of which process Lilias came into the room, all fresh and radiant, untouched by any darker knowledge.

'Just run away, my dear, Jean is not very well. I want her to stay quite quiet just for two or three minutes, and then she will come to you upstairs.'

'But why should I run away? Let me take care of her, Margaret. How pale she is!' cried Lilias, in alarm.

'There is—no—nothing the matter with me,' said Jean, tremulously, making shift to smile, and waving her hand to her darling. 'I'll be better —in two or three minutes.'

'Just run away, my dear,' Margaret repeated: and Lilias, as she was told, ran away, in considerable alarm and uneasiness. But, after all, there was nothing so alarming in the fact that Jean was pale, and wanted to be quiet for two or three minutes, and the fear soon dissipated itself. When the door was closed upon her, the two sisters looked at each other: the shadow of anger that had been between them had passed away. It even brought them nearer together,

this secret which was so momentous but which she, that young creature whom it was their happiness to guard from all evil, knew nothing of. Jean pressed Margaret's hand which held hers.

'You will not tell her?' she said.

'That is what we must see—and judge,' said the elder sister. 'We must think of it when you are better.'

Margaret said I oftener than we. It was a pledge of renewed union and closer fellowship, which brought back Jean's smile.

And next morning they left London. It had not been intended that they should go away till the end of the week, and their abrupt departure was the occasion of various disturbances of other people's plans. The person whom it was chiefly designed to affect was Lewis, who, knowing as he did the crisis that had been reached, and occupied indeed with the still more extraordinary crisis in his own existence, was not affected by it at all. He had never, during all the intercourse of those six weeks, been invited to Cadogan Place. He had been admitted occasionally when he called, latterly almost always, and it had been supposed by all the ladies that he would come to bid them good-bye. But after the interview

between Margaret and Mr. Allenerly there was an end to that intention, and it was only by chance he discovered their premature departure, which did not move him; for he had run through all the gamut of emotion, and nothing seemed now to matter. But as Lewis stood, more pensive than disappointed, gazing at the house, in the window of which once more hung the intimation that it was to let, and where a charwoman appeared at the door in place of Simon, some one else strode up, to whom it was, to all appearance, much more important. This was Philip Stormont, who, though he could not follow the ladies into the fashionable world, had hung about them whenever and wherever he could, following them to the park, turning up in all their walks, and attaching himself like a sort of amateur footman to the party. Lilias had been very cold to him for some time after that evening at the theatre, but by-and-by had slid into her old habit of a sort of sisterly indifference, thinking it not necessary to make much account of what Philip said or did. And her sisters were always 'kind—enough,' as Miss Jean said, to the young man whose lands marched with Murkley, their nearest county neighbour, whom they had

known all his life. When it was fully apparent to them that Lilias was entirely indifferent to this long-leggit lad, they were very kind to him, though they gave him much good advice on the subject of going home. He had hung on, following their steps, without any clear explanation of the reason why, always postponing his departure until the time of theirs approached. When that date was settled, he speedily found out that it was important he should get home by the 26th, and it was settled that he should travel with them. But in the hurry of sudden departure no one had thought of Philip. He came 'round,' as he called it, to make the final arrangements, and to settle where he should meet them, just at the moment when Lewis, walking slowly past, looking up at the windows, had concluded within himself, in a sort of stupor of over-feeling which made the discovery almost unimportant to him, that they were gone. What did it matter to Lewis? They were as far from him in Cadogan Place as if they had been in Murkley. It made no difference; between him and them there was a great gulf fixed. And yet he would have liked to see her once more! but it made no difference—this was what he

was saying to himself. To Philip, however, it made a very great difference. He went briskly up to the door, undismayed by a certain vacant air, and the ticket in the window. Indeed he had not observed these signs. And, when he was met by the charwoman with the news, his astonishment and indignation knew no bounds.

'Gone! Why, I was to go with them. Are you sure they are gone?' he said, with a dismay that was almost ludicrous. When he perceived Lewis a little way off, he hurried up to him. 'Do you understand anything about this?' he said, with a sense of injured antagonism to everybody who could be supposed to be in the ladies' confidence. There had always been a jealous feeling in his mind in respect to Lewis, whose constant presence at all the fine places of which Lilias spoke, to which he himself had no way of procuring admittance, had given him a feasible ground of complaint. But a common grievance is a great bond. When Lewis had declared his ignorance, in a tone from which even his insensibility to further pain could not take a certain pathos, Philip, in the excitement of his feelings, obliged to talk to some one, seized upon his arm, and poured out his heart.

'They just play with a man,' he cried, 'these women! They don't care a bit what they do to you, so long as it doesn't touch themselves. I was to go with them. It was all settled. Our way was the same, as far as the railway goes—as far as the waterside, for that matter; for you remember how near we are. And here they are, off without a word, without a single word! not so much as to say, "We are going sooner than we thought," or anything like that —but no, not a word! I was coming to ask where I was to meet them, and if I should take the tickets, and so forth.'

Lewis did his best to dissipate the victim's dilemma. He suggested a sudden change in their plans, a lost message, a mistake of one kind or another, till Philip was somewhat mollified. But in his heart he was not displeased to see another man suffer. That the ladies had been agitated by the revelation made to them, and had changed their plans, and forgotten their secondary engagements in consequence, soothed him and gave him a faint sensation of pleasure. Besides, it is never disagreeable to one man, whose heart is devoted to a certain woman, to see another man left in the lurch. So far as he was able to enjoy at all, Lewis enjoyed it, and

this made him very amiable to the other, who was certainly not a successful rival, or likely to be so. He who had affected their minds so much as to make them alter all their arrangements at the last moment had no reason to be uncharitable to the man whose very existence they had evidently forgotten. And Philip, in his ignorance, took refuge in the sympathy of Lewis. He had not seen him much in the company of Lilias; they had revolved in different spheres, and had rarely come in contact, and, so far as Philip knew, Lewis was little more than an acquaintance of the ladies, who never invited him, and seldom talked of him. He had forgotten by this time the position of companion to Lilias which Katie and he had thrust upon the stranger at Murkley. All that stage of existence had faded away from Philip's thoughts.

'You see,' he said, thrusting his arm through that of his sympathetic friend, 'I came here at first with no will of mine. A man should be left free one way or other. If the mother is to have so much say as my mother has, the son should be free to go where he likes, and make his own way; but, as it is, I am neither laird nor loon, if you understand what that means. I have the name of being independent; but, if my mother

were to take away her share and leave me with that house to keep up, where would I be? So I have to be guided by her in many ways, whether I will or not.'

'I do not suppose that she is very hard to please,' said Lewis, politely.

'Oh, I don't know about that! She has always had her own way, and she likes it. So do I, for that matter. But, you see, for years past there has never been but a craik about Lilias Murray. She was the only girl my mother would ever hear of: our lands march; and then the Murrays are a great family, and then——'

'Do you think it is right to talk of things so private to me?'

'Oh, you!—you are just the person to talk to them about. You are a stranger, you are an outsider; it cannot be any concern of yours. And then you know what an ass I made of myself last year,' Philip said, reddening, and with an embarrassed laugh.

'I do not know about the ass,' said Lewis, gravely; 'I know—what was happening last year.'

'Well, it comes to the same thing, you know. My mother would not hear of that—— It is all very well for a fellow like you, that are

independent, that never needs to think of pleasing anybody but yourself. But I can do nothing without my mother. As for marrying or that sort of thing, it would be out of the question. If she gave me up, I should be as poor as a church-mouse: so I am obliged to mind what she says. And then, if truth must be told, I got just a little tired of the affair itself.'

'I don't think,' said Lewis, disengaging his arm, 'that it is quite *comme il faut* to say so.'

'Com-eel—what do you mean by that? It began when I was too young to think of anything but the fun of it: and *she* liked the fun, too. It was a great joke to make a fool of everybody, and carry on behind their backs; but, when it comes to be serious, you can't go on like that.'

'I don't think you can go on *like that* at any time,' Lewis said, gravely.

Philip laughed.

'That is just your stiff, foreign way,' he said; 'you are always thinking harm—and there was no harm. Well, then, my mother insisted I was to go away, and, as there was a good opportunity to have a little yachting and see something of the world, I just consented. Absence makes a great difference, you know,' he added,

laughing again somewhat nervously. 'I saw what an ass I had been making of myself. And then I heard from home that the Murrays were here, and that I had better stay and make myself agreeable. Now, you know, there's a great deal to be done in London that makes the time pass. So I just stayed, and made myself agreeable—as far as I could, you know——'

'Indeed it is not for me to know how far that is,' said Lewis, with something between a jeer and a snarl: for it was not in flesh and blood to remain passive. 'You are a dangerous fellow, no doubt, when you please.'

'Oh, I don't know about that,' said simple Philip; 'it was a bore at first, but I couldn't help feeling that it was far the best way to get out of the other, you know. And that little Lilias has grown awfully pretty, don't you think?—whether it's the dress, or the way she's got of carrying herself, or having seen a little more of the world——'

Lewis would have liked to knock him down, but probably could not have done so, for the young Scot was much bigger and stronger than himself: and then, even if he could, he had no pretext for so doing, for there was no intentional disrespect in what Philip said.

'I never discuss ladies whom I respect—it is bad form,' said Lewis, bringing forward a word which he had picked up, and generally found most effectual.

Philip reddened and grew serious all at once. He was one of the class who hold that vague but stinging accusation in special awe.

'It would be worse form, I think, to discuss ladies whom you did not respect,' he said, very pertinently, but changing his tone. 'Well,' he said, 'to please you, I will say nothing about that. I thought it a bore at first, but by-and-by it was different. And it is just the only way of coming out of the other business safe and sound; and it would be a fine thing for the property; and, to sum up all, the girl herself—'

Lewis raised his hand, for he felt that he could not bear much more.

'You mean that you fell in love, I suppose, since that is the English phrase,' he said, with a slight inflection of contempt, which the ear of Philip was not keen enough to seize.

'Well, you may call it that, if you like,' he said. 'And I thought we were getting on very well—they all bully me, as if I were a small boy, and she too, but that's one way of showing that they consider me one of the family, you

know. So I thought we were getting on as well as possible, and I wrote home word to my mother, and we were to travel together, which would have given us just the opportunity to settle everything before we got home: and that was what I wanted above all——'

Here poor Philip's face grew long once more, and the sense of the ludicrous which had been growing in the mind of his hearer—a sort of forlorn amusement to think of this little common-place thread running smoothly through the tangled web of affairs—rose above the irritation and disdain, which were too serious for the occasion.

'Perhaps,' he said, gravely, 'it was the elder sisters. They might be afraid of you.'

Philip turned upon him with a beaming face and gave him a blow of approval on his shoulder.

'Now that just shows,' he said, 'that you have an eye in your head. I always knew you were a clever fellow—it is just that. Margaret cannot abide me—my mother herself sees it. She has just held me at arm's length since ever I was that height; but, if Lilias takes to me, I will just snap my fingers at Margaret,' cried the long-leggit lad, plucking up his courage.

Finally he made up his mind to follow them by the evening train, and pick them up at Stirling or Perth, where they would be sure, he thought, to stay for the night. And Lewis went home to his rooms, where also packing was going on, with a sense of exhaustion, through which faint sensations of amusement penetrated. He was sad as death, but, at the same time, he was worn out by a great mental conflict. At such a moment pain is deadened by its own excess. He was like a man newly out of a fever, not able to feel at all save in a muffled and ineffectual way: and it almost amused him to see Philip's self-complacency and confidence in 'getting on very well.' For such a rival he was not afraid.

CHAPTER X.

THE ladies were very tired when they got home. It is a long journey from London to the north. They were late next morning, and still languid with the fatigue, and with the curious sense of having dropped out of another sphere which came after their strange London experiences. To come into the old house, and see everything unchanged, was very wonderful. It made the past look like a dream. To Lilias, above all, for whom life had sustained an entire revolution, there was something extraordinary, weird, and uncanny about the old existence, which seemed to wait for her here like a distinct and separate thing, receiving her once more into its bosom, going on with her as if the other had never been. As she lingered with Jean over the late breakfast, from which Margaret had risen an hour before, she looked round upon the wainscot, with all those gleams of re-

flection in it which she remembered all her life, and the old pictures, and the furniture all in its place, with a sort of dismay.

'Do you think we have ever been away?' she said, with a scared look in her eyes. She was afraid of the stillness, which seemed to close over her, making all the colour and commotion of the past season, and all the new thoughts with which it had filled her mind, die away like things that had never been.

'That is just the feeling every time you make a change,' said Jean, 'for life is a very strange thing. I've sometimes thought it was never more than half real at the best of times: and whiles you would like to put forth your hand and grip to feel if it is true.'

This was beyond the experience of little Lilias; but there was a sensation of suspense and uncertainty in her mind which made her old sister's contemplative thoughts very congenial to her.

'It will turn out,' she said, with a laugh, the sound of which half frightened her, 'that we have all been sleeping and dreaming. But no! —for now I remember. I am not so silly now as when I went away. London was very bonnie, but not grand like what I thought, and,

oh, do you remember, Jean, about the Queen and the Court, what a fool—what a fool I was!' Lilias clapped her hands together in shame and self-impatience. 'You should have told me,' she cried.

'But, my dear,' said Miss Jean, 'I cannot affirm that I know any better, even now: for it was not me but Margaret that went with you to see Her Majesty. You are more experienced than I am. You have had a grand setting out in the world, Lilias; none of our house for many a day has done what you have done. Even your bonnie young mother, though she was an earl's daughter—you have had, you may say, the world at your feet, my bonnie dear. And it has not turned her head either,' said Miss Jean, smiling upon her with pride and happiness, 'you are just our little Lilias all the same.'

'The world at my feet! I wonder what that means?' cried Lilias, with a little scoff; but, after all, the suggestion was pleasant to her. She was silent a little, thinking, with a smile, of two or three acts of homage that had been done her, that had made the little girl aware that she was a woman in her moment of power. It pleased and flattered, and at the same time it amused her to recall those scenes in the brief

and bright drama which seemed, as she looked back upon it, like something she had seen in the theatre, a curious, vivid, all-interesting performance, in which the chief character was herself: and yet not herself, a visionary creature, whose proceedings she, Lilias Murray, at home in Murkley, could gaze at from afar with wonder and amusement. She put her hands softly together, and said, 'But if this is what it all comes to in the end!' But even as she said these words there came a delightful sense of expectation to her heart, and she laughed, knowing that this was not all it was coming to. Jean, for her part, gave a soft little sigh.

'When you are older, my darling,' she said, 'you will find a great soothing in always coming back. Home is just like an old friend holding its arms open to you, always waiting for you, aye ready, whatever troubles you may be in.'

Lilias listened, smiling. It was not the aspect of home which pleased her fancy at the moment. Of all unrealities in the world nothing seemed so unreal to her as the idea that a refuge from trouble would ever be needful for the long young life that was in her heart and her thoughts. She looked at her sister with a loving pity, tinged with amusement too. It was

natural that Jean should look upon it so. Dear Jean! with all her pretty, old-fashioned ways the tranquillity of her gentle soul. She was in her element at Murkley, not in London. Lilias knew that the old table-cover, with all its silken flowers half done, would come out in another half hour, and the basket of silks be set forth upon the little table: and that Jean, with her fine head relieved against the window, would look as if she had never moved from that spot. She laughed at the thought, which was sweet, comical, pleasant. For her own part, she would sit down with a book in the other window and look back, and behold the performances of that other Lilias who had the world at her feet, and wonder—wonder and dream what was going to come of it all! as if in her heart she did not know very well what was going to come.

But, as they were preparing to go to the drawing-room to carry out this performance, a voice reached their ears from the hall with a somewhat excited, anxious tone in it.

'I could not have been more surprised if they had told me the Queen had come: for I expected you all to-morrow. And what have you done with my Philip?' Mrs. Stormont said. She came into the dining-room, followed by Margaret, and

came forward to the table, holding out her hands with an air of joyous welcome under which there was a certain restlessness of anxiety. 'Oh, fie! this is your London hours, still at breakfast when other people are thinking of their luncheon. But we must forgive you this time on account of your journey; and what have you done with my Philip?' she said again.

'Bless me!' said Margaret, 'to think I should have been so far left to myself as to forget all about that. It is true Philip was to have travelled with us to-morrow; but circumstances made it more convenient for me to come away sooner, and I never let him know. But I dare to say,' she added, 'that he will not be ill-pleased; for to attend upon three women and their boxes is a trial for any man.'

Mrs. Stormont shot a keen look at the speaker over the shoulder of Lilias, whom she was just then embracing with great fervour.

'Margaret is always severe upon men, as is perhaps natural enough,' she said; 'but I would have thought my bonnie Lily would have had more feeling. And so my poor lad is left to kick his heels at the railway station waiting for them that never come? I cannot thank you for that, Margaret. I think you might have

had a little more consideration. There was perhaps something due to me—if Philip, poor man, was not grand enough to merit a thought—'

'Indeed I can assure you,' cried Miss Jean, anxiously, 'there was no want of thought. But, you see, we had serious business to attend to, and Margaret was very much taken up at the end, and we were just hurried away——'

Mrs. Stormont did not make any reply. It was evident that she was anxious underneath the offence, and full of uneasy thoughts. She drew Lilias into a chair by her side, and held her hand, and stroked it tenderly.

'And you have just had a great success, by all I hear. The Lily of Murkley has been blooming in the King's gardens. But I hope it has not turned your little head. For, whatever strangers may say, there are no hearts so leal as those are at home.'

'You must think me a very silly little thing,' said Lilias, 'if you suppose that would turn my head. It was never for us; it was just because of——' Here she caught Margaret's eye, and divined by something in it, and perhaps also by a rising something in her own breast which brought the colour to her cheeks, that her intended attribution of honour where honour was

due was for the moment unnecessary. 'Because of friends,' she said, with hesitation and a blush. 'Because of him, because of him!' she added to herself in her heart, with an indignant glance at Margaret.

If she were prevented from saying it out, all the more would she maintain it to herself.

'Good introductions,' said Margaret, significantly, 'are, as everybody knows, the half of the battle; and it would be strange if the Murrays of Murkley could not get that advantage. It is all very well over, I am glad to say. And Lilias has enjoyed herself, and we have all seen a great deal of company; but for my part I enjoy nothing so much as getting home.'

'And what did you make of my Philip?' said Mrs. Stormont. 'That is a crow I have to pick with you, Lilias; for he would have been home long ago, but for somebody that kept him hanging on in town. "I have put off for another day; for I'm going to a ball at Lady So-and-so's, where the Miss Murrays will be——" And then, "I've put off a week; for I'm going to travel with the Murrays." That is what his letters have been, poor fellow—and then to be left in the lurch at the end. Ye little fairy! If

your head's not turned, I am afraid you have turned other people's heads,' said Philip's mother, with a laughing flattery, which concealed much graver feelings.

Lilias was somewhat alarmed by this personal attack. She looked at her sisters for help, and it was Jean who came first into the breach.

'You need not be in any way uneasy about that; for Philip has plenty of friends,' said Miss Jean. 'We met him no doubt from time to time, and he was extremely kind in coming to see us; but he had always a number of friends —he was not depending upon us. I assure you it could not make that difference to him,' she said, anxiously.

Mrs. Stormont confronted her with a superior smile.

'My dear Jean,' she said, 'do you think I was supposing my son had no friends, or was just depending upon his country neighbours for a little society? No, no, I am not such an ignoramus as that, though I have myself been little in London, and never was at the expense of a season: but I am not just so ignorant as that. There are other reasons that influence a young man, and one that has had every encouragement——'

'Encouragement!' Margaret said, whose eyes were full of the light of battle.

'Encouragement!' said Miss Jean, deprecating. 'We were just kind, as was natural.'

The mother returned the look of defiance, and took no notice of Jean.

'Indeed, my dear Margaret,' she said, 'I was not addressing myself to you. It is well known in the countryside what your ambition is, and that nothing less than a duke or a prince would please you, if you had any chance of getting them. I am speaking to Lilias, not to you, and I am not a person to stand by and see a young thing's heart crushed, especially one that might, had matters taken another turn, have been my own. Yes, my bonnie pet, it is you that I am speaking to; and you know you have given my boy a great deal of encouragement. You will not be persuaded by thoughts of a grand match, or by worldly inducements, or by the fear of man—or woman either—to turn against one—'

Here she stopped, perhaps with a sense of the rashness of this appeal. She was very tremulous and anxious, and as she looked round upon the three sisters, who had all been instrumental, as she thought, in disappointing her and scorning her son and leaving him behind, it was all

the mother could do to restrain the flood of bitter words that came pouring to her lips. She stopped, however, hastily, and with a little agitated laugh.

'I am just taking the disappointment a great deal too seriously, you will say; but I am disappointed, you see. I looked for my Philip coming home happy and well pleased; and then to hear you were back before your time, and not a word from him!—But no doubt he'll be home to-morrow, and nothing changed. I am just going too fast; you will think nothing of it. I'm of an anxious nature, and it's my way.'

The elder ladies accepted the apology, according to their different characters, Miss Jean eagerly agreeing that it was very disappointing when you were looking for your only son, and found nothing but strangers, and Miss Margaret receiving it stiffly with a dignity beyond words.

'For,' she said, 'though we might be glad of the company of any friend on a long journey, yet I never think it a good thing for women to put their fashes about luggage and so forth upon a man, unless he belongs to them. He is apt,' she added, 'to think more of it than it deserves—as if the women could have done nothing without him, which is not my way.'

'No,' said Mrs. Stormont, with a laugh which was in itself a confession of excitement; 'you're one of those that like to be independent. But don't you copy your sister in that, Lilias, for it is a thing the men cannot bide. They would rather you were silly, and always clinging to them, than going your own gait in that bold manner. And though it may suit Margaret, who is done with everything of the kind, it is not the same for you.'

Lilias had been watching the scene with anxious, half amused eyes. There had always been little passages of arms between Margaret and Mrs. Stormont.

'Philip is not very clever about the luggage,' she said. 'He lost all his own things, you know. I told him I could do it better myself.'

'And what did he say?' said the mother, beaming upon her. 'Oh, nothing to say over again, I am sure, for he is not one for phrases, my Philip. And so you had your fill of dancing and every pleasure? Well, well! it is a grand thing to have your day; and now you've come back, Lilias, just as you went, you must not scorn your old friends. "Sneer na British lads awa'," as Burns says.'

'I hope she will sneer at nobody,' said Miss

Jean; 'and two or three months in London is not such a terrible time. There are few changes in the parish, so far as I can hear. Old Mrs. Johnston at The Hillhead is gone, poor lady; but that was to be looked for at her age; and young Lauder married upon his housekeeper, which is a great pity, and must vex all his friends; and——'

'No,' said Mrs. Stormont, still looking at Lilias; 'there's little sneering in that bonnie face; but still hearing just one thing round you may give a warp to your mind, and you must remember, Lilias, that the grand folk in London, though they may be very smiling for a time, they just go their own gait, and think no more of a country girl, however she might be admired for the moment; but old friends are always safe—they never change.'

'Old friends or new friends, I would not advise her to be dependent upon either one or the other,' said Margaret. 'It's best to stand on your own ground. Lilias, will you go and tell Simon about getting out the carriage, and bid him ask if we can have the horses, for there are some visits that we ought to pay. You will forgive me,' she said, when the girl left the room, 'for sending her away: for we must re-

spect her simplicity at her age. She is thinking nothing, neither of British lads nor of any other. I am not one that likes to put such things in a girl's head.'

Mrs. Stormont blushed with anger and annoyance.

'It is the first time,' she said, 'that I have been blamed with putting things that should not be there into a girl's head. But we all know about maidens' bairns—and since Lilias is to be the immaculate one that never thinks upon a lover—But, if that was your meaning, I wonder you ever took her to London, which is just the grand marriage market, if what everybody says is true.'

'It was no marriage market, you may be sure,' cried Margaret, growing red in her turn, 'for any child of mine.'

'Well, that is proved, no doubt,' said the other, with the composure of successful malice, 'since Lilias ye took her away, and Lilias ye have brought her back.'

'Oh, what is the use,' cried Miss Jean, breaking in anxiously, 'of the like of us old friends casting out with each other about nothing? If Lilias were to be married, it would be a terrible day for Margaret and me.'

'Oh, nobody will doubt that,' cried Philip's mother. 'After being mistress and more at Murkley, and keeping that little thing that she dare not say her soul's her own, it would be a terrible down-coming for Margaret——'

'Mrs. Stormont!' Jean exclaimed, in terror and dismay.

As for Margaret, who had been moving about, setting various things in order, she came back at this to where the visitor was sitting, pale and red by turns, in great nervous excitement. Margaret was very composed, and smiled, though she was pale.

'I can make every allowance,' she said, 'for a disappointed mother.'

She had the best of it, after all. She was able to regard with perfect calmness the heat and passion of the other, whose long-leggit lad had come so little speed.

'I am not the one to call disappointed,' said Mrs. Stormont. 'I am not a woman with ambitions, like you. It is not me that has made a great campaign, and nothing to show for it. But I would warn you just to mind what you are about, for to play fast and loose with a high-spirited lad——'

'Bless me!' said Margaret, in a tone which

Jean herself could not but allow to be very irritating, 'who may that be? There were two or three, I will allow, but they got their answer. Though I say it that should not say it, having brought her up myself, Lilias is very clear in her notions; she will never say no when she means yes, of that we may be sure.'

'Well,' cried Mrs. Stormont, rising hurriedly, 'I can only hope you'll find things answer to your anticipations. It would be a terrible thing to go through the wood and through the wood, and take up with a crooked stick at the end.'

'Or perhaps without a stick at all,' said Margaret, with sarcastic gravity, 'which has happened with both Jean and me, you were going to say.'

'And so I was,' said the angry woman—'you have just divined it; but that beats all, Margaret Murray. If you are going to doom that bonnie little thing to be an old maid like yourself, just that you may keep the management and power in your hands——'

'It is such a grand scope for management, and so much power——'

'It's just as much as you ever had the chance of. Oh, I can see through you. You just flatter her and stop the mouths of her friends with

giving her every opportunity, that you know will come to nothing—I see through you like glass—and so keep her property in your hands, and make her an old maid like yourself. And to keep up the farce,' cried Mrs. Stormont, 'you'll keep one or two just hanging on, and give them every encouragement. But just see if she does not turn upon you one of these days, and choose for herself.'

She hurried out, sending this shot after her from the door, and leaving, it cannot be disputed, a great deal of the smoke and confusion of a cannonade behind her. Even Margaret was confused, disturbed by that sudden perception of how her proceedings might appear in the eyes of others, which is so disenchanting. It is not a happy, though it may be an improving process, to see ourselves as others see us. Though she was so angry, she looked at her sister with a little dismay.

'The woman is daft,' she said. 'Who was it that encouraged that long-leggit lad of hers? Never me, I'll answer for that. I hope it was not you, Jean, that out of superabundant charity——'

'He came here more than you liked in the afternoons, Margaret, last year.'

'And what of that?' cried the mistress of Murkley. 'If it had been Donald Birnie, could I have turned him away from the door?'

'Donald Birnie knows his place,' said Miss Jean, doubtfully; 'but Philip is just very suitable; and his mother might think——'

'I cannot tell what you mean with your "very suitable." Would you like our Lilias to take up with the first long-leggit lad that comes to hand? I thought we were agreed upon that point, you and me.'

'Oh, Margaret, I am saying nothing else! I was only thinking that it would not be so strange if his mother—— And then there was always that little Katie here.'

'Now that is what *I* would call very suitable,' said Margaret, regaining her composure. This recollection freed her at once from a little fear that was beginning to creep upon her. 'Katie! that would just be the best thing in the world for him; for the Setons are very well connected; and it would settle Philip Stormont, and make him steady, and be company to his mother. There could be nothing better,' Margaret said.

But, unfortunately, this was not how the matter presented itself to those who were more immediately concerned. Mrs. Stormont went

forth in haste and heat, which old Simon, as he opened the door, perceived with a chuckle, divining, with tolerable justice, the state of affairs: for Simon, an old family retainer, was just as determined as Miss Margaret that no long-leggit lad should carry off the young lady of Murkley. Mrs. Stormont went away very hurriedly, and in so doing encountered little Katie Seton hurrying towards the house. The very sight of the girl added to the soreness and sense of downfall which was in the mind of Philip's mother. She seemed to see Fate lowering upon her over Katie's head. What if she were destined to accept the minister's daughter for her son's wife after all!

'You are losing no time,' she said. 'Katie! you mean to hear all the grand news and see the grand dresses the first moment that it's possible. It is the best way.'

'I am not so early as you, Mrs. Stormont,' said Katie, who was pert, and not inclined to yield her own cause.

'You will allow there is a difference,' the angry woman said. 'My son was to have travelled with them; but he had a number of engagements, having so many friends in London, and he left them in the lurch, which gentlemen

are too apt to do, even at the last moment. It is not pretty of them, but it's just their nature,' said Mrs. Stormont. This was an arrow into Katie's heart as well as a forestalling of any report in respect to Philip's unsuccess which she might hear. Katie replied with a smile only, and went on to the house; but she had received the arrow. And Philip's mother felt that she had in some degree redeemed the fallen fortunes of the day.

CHAPTER XI.

'AND was it all very grand, Lilias? and did the ladies wear their diamonds every day? and did you see the Queen? and what did she say to you? I've come to hear everything —everything!' cried Katie. She had taken off her hat and established herself in that corner of the book-room where so many talks had taken place, where Lilias had painted all the anticipatory scenes of grandeur which she intended to go through, and where she had listened to Katie's plans, and not refused her aid. It was a year since they had met, and Lilias, seated there, with a little mist of suspense about her, waiting for the next chapter in her life, had an air of dreamy development and maturity which made a great impression upon her friend. In other days Katie, though the youngest, had been the one that knew most of the world. She had been full of dances, of partners, of

what this one and that had said, while Lilias had still no souvenirs. But all this had changed. It was Lilias now who knew the world. She had gone away, she had been in the secrets of society. She knew how duchesses looked, and what they put on. She had seen princes walking familiarly about as if they were but men. Was it this lofty experience which gave her that soft air as of a dream enveloping her, as if, to put it in Katie's way, she was thinking of something else, listening for somebody coming. Katie did not understand the change; but she saw it now, and it overawed her. Her eyes sought those of Lilias wistfully. There were other questions more important which she had to ask; but, to begin with, the general ones seemed necessary. She kept in her personal anxieties with an effort. For Katie had many personal anxieties too, and was rather woebegone and pale, not like the sprightly little girl of old.

'It was not nearly so grand as I thought—nothing is ever so grand as you think,' said Lilias. 'London town is just big—big—not grand at all, and men just look like men, and women like women. They are silly just like ourselves. It is not another world, as I once

thought. It is quite the same. It was an *awful* disappointment,' said Lilias, with a Scottish force of adjective which had not come to be slang in those days; 'but it was just nice enough all the same,' she added, condescendingly, after a momentary pause. 'I thought I would just look at it all, and admire it; but you could not do that, you had just to take your part, as if you had been at home.'

'Oh, I should not have cared to look at it,' said Katie. 'I would have liked to have my share.'

'Except at the countess's,' said Lilias, with an involuntary laugh. 'We stood there, and looked on. Lady Ida came and talked to us, and the countess herself. And then we stood and stared at all the people. It makes me laugh now, but then it was like to make me cry. We were only country neighbours there.'

'And what were you in the other houses?' Katie asked.

'I don't know. It was different——' Lilias paused a little, musing, with eyes full of a smile of recollection; then she said, suddenly, glad to have an outlet, 'Guess whom we met in London—a gentleman—one that you know. And he knew everybody—and——' Lilias made another

pause of grateful thought, then added, softly, 'he was a great man there.'

Katie clasped her hands together. To her Philip Stormont was a great man anywhere. Her little countenance flushed, then grew pale, and it could be seen how thin her cheeks had grown, and her eyes big and eager, as the colour melted out of her face. She did not say anything, but looked at Lilias with a wide-eyed, deeply meaning, reproachful look. Her poor little bosom heaved with a painful, long-drawn breath. Oh, how can you speak to me of him, her eyes seemed to say; and yet how anxious she was to hear!

'Can't you guess?' said Lilias, with a smile of content.

'I suppose—it could be but one person. But oh, Lilias, everything is so changed, so changed!' cried poor little Katie; and those caves, once soft circles in which her pretty eyes were set, seemed to contract, and fill with deep lakes of tears. She kept them back with a great effort, and produced a little pitiful smile, the best she could muster. 'I am sure it isn't your fault,' she said, magnanimously. 'Tell me—all about it, Lilias.'

'All about what?' Lilias paused too, to look

at her in amazement, and a sort of cold breath came into her heart, chilling her in spite of herself. 'I did not know,' she said, with sudden spirit, waking out of her dream, 'that Mr. Murray was of any consequence, Katie, to you.'

Katie's countenance changed again in a moment from misery to gladness.

'Oh, Mr. Murray!' she cried. In the relief of the moment, the tears came dropping down her cheeks like rain, and she laughed in the sudden ease of her mind. 'No, no consequence, no consequence at all,' she cried. 'I thought—I thought it must be——'

The eyes of the girls met, the one inquiring, almost with a gleam of contempt; the other shyly drawing back, denying the answer.

'I see,' said Lilias, nodding her head. 'No, I had not forgotten. I knew very well—— But, dear Katie,' she cried, with the unrestrained laugh of youth, 'you could not think Philip—for it was Philip you thought of—could be a great man in London. Philip!' The idea brought with it a peal of laughter. 'He may be very nice at home, but among all the fashionable folk there——!'

Katie did not laugh with her friend; on the contrary, she grew red and angry. Her tears

dried, high indignation lighted up her face, but along with it a little consolation too.

'They say,' said Katie, 'that you were not always of that mind, Lilias, and that he was with you—oh, every day. They say he went with you to all the parties, and danced with you every dance. They say—— I would like you to tell me true,' cried the little girl. 'Oh, you need not think I will break my heart! Whatever has happened, if you think *I* will make a work about it, and a fuss, and all that, you are just mistaken, Lilias! I hope I have more pride than that. If he likes you better than me, he is welcome, oh, he is welcome! And if you that were my own friend, that was like a sister—that was——'

Poor little Katie was choked with tears and excitement. She could not say any more. Her voice failed her altogether, everything swam and wavered in her eyes. Her own familiar friend had deceived her, her love had forsaken her. The bitterness of abandonment was in her heart. She had struggled hard to show what her mother called 'a proper pride,' and though it had hollowed out the sockets of her eyes, and taken the colour from her cheeks, she thought she had succeeded. But to hear

Lilias, who had stolen him away, speak disdainfully of Philip, to hear him scoffed at, whom Katie thought the first and most desirable of human beings; it is impossible to say how hard this was. All the faculties of her sou rose up against it: and yet—and yet—— She would not have let herself go, and suspend her proper pride so entirely, if there had not been beyond, as it were the sense of her despair, a rising gleam of hope.

'Who said that?' cried Lilias, in great astonishment and dismay. And then she drew Katie's unwilling form towards her. 'Do you think so much about Philip still? Oh, Katie, he is not half good enough for you.'

Katie flung herself out of her friend's grasp.

'I can put up with your treachery,' she cried. 'Oh! I can stand that; but to hear you insult Philip is what I will not, I will not bear!'

Upon which Lilias sprang to her feet also.

'I will say just what I please of Philip,' she cried; 'and who is to stop me? What am I caring about Philip? I just endured him because of you. He neither went with me to parties, nor danced with me, nor was with us every day. He is just a long-leggit lad, as Margaret says. If he was rich or great, or if he

was clever and wise, or even if he was just kind —kind and true like some—— But he is none of these, none of these, Katie, not half good enough for you; and me, what is Philip to me?' Lilias cried, with a grand disdain.

'Perhaps he has forsaken you—too,' said Katie, looking at her with mingled wrath and relief and indignation. She was very wroth and wounded for Philip, but her heart, which had been so sore, felt cooled and eased as by the dropping of some heavenly dew. Her anger with Lilias was boundless. She could not refrain from that little blow at her, and yet she could have embraced her for every careless word she said.

Lilias looked at her for a moment, uncertain whether to be angry too. But then the absurdity of the idea that Philip might have forsaken her, suddenly seized her. She laughed out with a gaiety that could not be mistaken, and took her seat again.

'When you are done questioning me about Philip—' she said. 'I would not have remembered Philip but for you. We forgot he was to have come home with us, and never let him know; and nobody remembered, not even *Jean.* But we have heard enough of Philip since we

came home. His mother has been here, demanding, "What have you done with my Philip?"' Lilias here fell into Mrs. Stormont's tone, and Katie, though still in tears, had hard ado not to laugh. 'Just demanding him from Margaret and from me: and you next, Katie. As if we were Philip's keepers! He is big enough, I hope, to take care of himself.'

Here Katie came stealing up to her friend, winding a timid arm about her neck.

'Oh! Lilias, was it all stories? and are you true, are you true?'

'Is that what has made you just a little ghost? And why did you never write and tell me, when I could have put it all right with a word?'

'Oh, what could I say?' cried Katie. 'A girl must have a proper pride. Would I let you see and let *him* see that I was minding? Oh! no, no! and his mother every time we met her, and every time mamma met her, always, always on about Philip and you. She told us all the places he went with you—every place, even to the Queen's Court: and there was his name in the *Times*—for she got it on purpose, and sent it over the water to papa: and she said he always contrived to get an invitation wherever you went.'

Lilias smiled with high disdain.

'Many people would have liked to do that,' she said, 'for we went to the grandest houses, where Philip Stormont, or even the Murrays of Murkley, who are very different, would never set a foot. Oh! it was no credit of ours—we just had—a friend——'

'A friend! And that was the gentleman you meant, not *him;* and it was a person I knew? I cannot guess it, for I don't know any person who could be a friend to you. But just it was not—him? That is so wonderful, I cannot think of anything else; for all this time I have been thinking and thinking, and trying not to think, and then just thinking the more.'

Lilias smiled upon her, a gracious, but half disdainful, half disappointed smile. Katie could think of nothing but this. She had no sympathy, no interest, in what had happened to her friend. It hurt Lilias a little: for there was no one else whom she could speak to of that other who was so much more important than Philip. She was wounded a little, and retired into herself in lofty, but gentle superiority. She could have told things that would have made her little companion admire and wonder. But what did Katie care except about Philip, a country youth who

was nobody, a rustic gentleman that gaped and was helpless in the brilliant world? Lilias felt a great superiority, but yet a little check and disappointment too. It seemed to her that her little companion had fallen far behind her in the march of life, that Katie was only a child, crying, sobbing, unable to think of anything but one thing—and a little nobody, too. She herself had gone a long way beyond her little rural companion, which was quite just—for was not Lilias a whole year older, besides her season in town? So she allowed herself to be tolerant and indulgent. Was it not natural? So young and little, and only one thing in her head—Philip, and no more. Lilias put away her own interrupted history with a proud self-denial. She would not betray it to anyone who was not worthy of that confidence, although her heart ached a little with the solitude of it and the need of speech. But surely it was but for a day or two that it could be allowed to continue, this solitude of the heart? She went out in the afternoon with Katie for a walk, and went to New Murkley with many a thought. But New Murkley was overflowing to Katie with images of Philip, and Lilias moved along abstracted, always with a little sense of disdainful wonder



and toleration for one who could think of nothing but Philip, though on the verge, had she chosen, of far greater things.

When she returned to her sisters afterwards, she found these ladies in a state of great perturbation and distress. Jean was sitting, with her bonnet still on, too much agitated to think of her work. Margaret was walking up and down the drawing-room, also in her outdoor dress, and carrying on an indignant monologue. The entrance of Lilias discomposed them both. They had not expected her, and, as Margaret did not perceive her at first, Jean gave a little exclamation of warning.

'Margaret, it is Lilias!' she cried.

And Margaret, in her walk up and down, turned round and faced her, with a look of annoyance which it was impossible to conceal. She was heated and angry, and the interruption aggravated her discontent. She said,

'Well, what about Lilias? It's all Lilias so far as I can see, and we seem just fated to have no more peace in our lives.'

'Is it I that am taking away your peace, Margaret?' Lilias said. She had come in with a kind of lofty sadness and longing, her heart full, and no relief to it possible, her life waiting,

as it seemed, for a touch from without—a something which could not come of her own initiative. It was not enough to trouble her as with a sense of dependence, but only to make her sensible of an incompleteness, an impotence, which yet was sweet.

'There are several persons, it appears, from whom ye have taken away the peace,' said Margaret. 'The countryside is just ringing with it from all I hear. When was it that you gave so much encouragement to that long-leggit fellow, Philip Stormont? I have heard of little else all the time I have been out, and Jean will tell you the same thing. They say he went to every place with us in London (I told you not to take him to the theatre, Jean), and that it's all settled between him and you.'

'Margaret, I would not speak like that to Lilias that knows nothing about such things.'

'Just hold your peace, Jean; if she does not know about them, she'll have to learn. When a man wants her to marry him, she'll have to hear about it, and make her own decision.' Margaret's conscience, perhaps, upbraided her at this moment, for she made a perceptible pause, then resumed, with increased impatience: 'It may be true, for anything we can tell. You

gave him great encouragement, they say, before we went from here—was that true? for I've many a thing to think of, and I cannot call all these bits of nothings to mind.'

'Oh, Margaret, how can ye upbraid our Lilias, that is as innocent as an infant? Encouragement, as they call it, was what she never gave any lad. Encouragement, say they?—that just means a forward person that knows what a gentleman is meaning, and helps him on. Lilias, my dear,' said Jean, 'you'll just run away. Even to hear the like of that is not for you.'

'Is it Philip Stormont again?' cried Lilias. 'I think you are very unkind, Margaret; you ought to take my part, instead of scolding me. What am I caring about Philip Stormont? I wish he was—no, I don't wish him any harm—I don't care enough about him,' cried the girl, angrily. 'What is it now?'

'She knows there is something, Jean.'

'And how could she help knowing, Margaret, when his mother was at her this morning with that very word in her mouth? Encouragement!—it's just his mother's doing, everything about it; he would never raise that cry himself.'

'Himself!—he has not enough in him,' said Margaret. 'But, Lilias, whatever you have

done, you will have to bear the blame, and it must just be a lesson to us all. In the first place, they were all for congratulating us, every person we met. Bonnie congratulations! I think the world is out of its wits. To wish us joy of wedding the heiress of Murkley upon a bonnet-laird like Philip Stormont! The old Murrays would just turn in their graves, but all this senseless canailye wishes us joy.'

'Oh, whisht, Margaret! the people just meant very well; no doubt they had many a private thought in their mind, but they would think it was well to put the best face upon it.'

'And, when they saw we knew nothing of it, what does the minister's wife do but reads me a lecture on the sin of crossing young folk in their affections! I am the kind of person, you will say, to be lectured by Mrs. Seton and Mrs. Stormont, and all the rest,' said Margaret, with a laugh of scorn; but it was not indifferent to her. There was a slight nervous tremor about her person, which betrayed a vexation almost more serious than her words conveyed. 'I am not finding fault with you, Lilias. I well believe you meant no harm, and never thought you could be misconceived; but I would mind upon this in the future if I were you. Meet with

nobody and walk with nobody but those that belong to you, or that are like yourself. If you do that, you will give no handle to any ill-disposed person. My dear, I am not finding fault.'

'It sounds worse than finding fault,' said Lilias. 'It sounds as if you thought I had been—— Oh!' she cried, with a little stamp of her foot, 'unwomanly!—you will not say the word, but I know that is what you mean. And it is not so—it never was so. It was not for me, it was for——'

Here Lilias stopped in her impetuous self-defence, stopped, and blushed crimson, and said, more impetuously still, but with a tone of humility and self-reproach—

'I am just a traitor! It is true—I am a false friend.'

'That was what I said, Margaret,' cried Jean, 'you will mind what I said.'

Of this Margaret took no notice, neither of the interrupted speech of Lilias, but continued to pace about the room with a clouded brow. She asked no further explanations; but she had many thoughts to oppress her mind. The Countess had been one of those who had wished her joy. That great lady had stopped her carriage,

in which Lady Ida sat smiling, and, with a certain air of triumph, had offered her congratulations.

'I always thought there was something between them,' she had said, 'and two such charming young people, and in every way so suitable—'

'Your ladyship seems to forget,' Margaret had said, trembling with wrath, 'that the Murrays of Murkley have been in the county before any other name that's worth counting was heard of, and were never evened with the small gentry, so far as I know, till this day.'

'Oh! my dear Miss Murray, that is quite an antediluvian view to take,' the Countess had said, and had driven off in great glee, accepting none of the angry sister's denials. There was something underneath that made this very galling to Margaret. Young Lord Bellendean had been one of those that had been at the feet of Lilias, and this was the reason of his mother's triumph. It had its effect upon Margaret, too, in a way which was not very flattering to young Bellendean. She had not been insensible to the pleasure of seeing the best match in the country-side refused by her little sister. Lord Bellendean, too, was one of the class which she described as long-leggit lads; but a peerage and

great estates make a difference. Lilias had never shown any inclination towards their noble young neighbour; but the refusal of him would have been gratifying. And now his mother, with this story of Philip, would turn Bellendean effectually away. This was the chief sting of the discovery she had made. But even to Jean she had not betrayed herself. She was aware that perhaps it was not a very elevated hope, and that her mortification would have but little sympathy had the cause of it been revealed. This was in the foreground of her mind, and held the chief place among her disturbed thoughts. But it was not all. She could not flatter herself she had got rid of Lewis Murray by turning her back upon him. Thus she stood as in the midst of a circle of masked batteries. She did not know from which side the next broadside would come. It was indispensable for her to be prepared on every hand.

CHAPTER XII.

PHILIP STORMONT did not return home for a week, during which period Lilias had ample reason to share her sister's annoyance. She was received wherever she appeared with congratulations and good wishes, though it was a very daft-like thing, the village people thought, for young folk, who had known each other all their lives and might have spoken whenever they pleased, to go away up to London, and meet in strange houses there before they could come to an understanding.

'No true! hoot, Miss Lilias! It must be true, for I had it from the leddy hersel',' was the reception her denial got: and there was not unfrequently a glance aside at Katie, which showed the consciousness of the speaker of another claim. It was a curious study in human nature for the neighbourhood, and, though it was per-

haps cruel, the interest of the race in mental phenomena generally may have accounted for the pleasure mingled with compassion with which one after another offered in Katie's presence their good wishes to Lilias, keenly observing meantime the air and aspect of the maiden forsaken.

'It'll no have been true about Miss Katie and him, after all,' Janet, at the 'Murkley Arms,' announced to her husband, 'for she took it just as steady as a judge.'

'Oh, ay, it was true enough; but men are scarce, and he's just ta'en his pick,' said Adam.

'My word, but he's no blate,' said Janet, in high indignation. 'Two of the bonniest and best in a' the countryside for Philip Stormont to take his pick o'! I would soon learn him another lesson. And it's just a' lees—a' lees from beginning to end.'

'In that case,' said Adam, with philosophic calm, 'I would not fash my thoom about it, if I were you.' But this philosophy was more than Janet was capable of. She bade him gang aff to his fishing for a cauld-hearted loon, that took nae interest in his fellow-creatures.

'It's naething to you if a young thing breaks

her bit heart,' Janet said; and she added, with a sigh, 'No to say that I had ither views for Miss Lilias mysel'.'

Perhaps it was some glimmer of these 'ither views,' some implication of another name, never mentioned, but understood between them by a subtle feminine freemasonry, which made Lilias insist so warmly to Janet upon the falsehood of the common report. The girls went on to the manse after this explanation, Lilias walking with great dignity, but with a flush of offence and annoyance on her face.

'I wish he would just come back, and let them see it is all lies,' Lilias cried.

Katie dried a furtive tear when they got within the shelter of the manse garden. Would Philip, when he came, show that it was all lies? or was he minded, like his mother, to make it true? And, if he put forth those persuasive powers which Katie felt so deeply, could Lilias resist him? These questions kept circling through Katie's brain in endless succession. 'It would maybe be better if he never came back,' she said, with a sigh.

Mrs. Seton was in all the bustle of her morning's occupations. She came into the drawing-room a little heated, and with some suppressed

excitement in her eyes. Katie's mother was not entirely in Katie's confidence, but she knew enough of her child's mind to take an agitated and somewhat angry interest in the news of Lilias' supposed engagement. Perhaps indeed she was not without a guilty sense of intention in her former hospitality to Philip, which turned now, by a very common alchymy of the mind, into an angry feeling that she had been kind to him, and that he had been very ungrateful. She came in with a little bustle, unable to chase from her countenance some traces of offence.

'Well, Lilias, so you have come to be congratulated,' she said. 'I am sure I wish you every prosperity. Nobody will doubt that we wish you well, such great friends as you have always been with Katie, and all the old connection between us and Murkley.' Here she kissed the girl on both cheeks sharply, conveying a little anger even in the kiss. 'But I think, you know, you were a little wanting—oh! just a little wanting, I'll not say much—considering all the intimacy, not to write at once and let Katie know——'

'I would like to hear what there was to let Katie know,' cried Lilias, with indignation.

'And why you should wish me prosperity? You never did it before. I am just as I always was before; and as for Philip Stormont,' cried the girl, 'he is nothing to me. Oh, yes, he is something—he is a great trouble and bother, and makes Margaret angry, and everybody talk nonsense. I wish he was at the other end of the world!' Lilias cried, with a little stamp of her impatient foot upon the floor.

'Dear me!' said Mrs. Seton, 'but this is very different from what we heard. No, no, it must be just a little temper, Lilias, and Margaret's scolding that makes you turn it off like this. I can well understand Margaret being angry,' said the minister's wife, with a gleam of satisfaction. 'Her that thought nobody too grand for you; but there is no calculating upon young folk. Here is Lilias, Robert; but she is just in an ill way. She will have none of my good wishes. She has quarrelled with him, I suppose. We all know what a lover's quarrel is. Yes, yes, she'll soon come to herself. And it would be a terrible thing, you know, to tell a fib to your clergyman,' Mrs. Seton said, with an attempt at raillery; but she was anxious in spite of herself.

'Miss Lilias,' said the minister, who had come

in, and who was more formal, 'will have little doubt of our good wishes in all circumstances, and especially on a happy——'

'Oh, will you hold all your tongues!' cried Lilias, driven out of recollection of her good manners, and of the respect she owed, as Mrs. Seton said, to her clergyman. 'There's no circumstances at all, and nothing happy, nor to wish me joy about. I am no more engaged than you are,' she said, addressing Mr. Seton, who stood, interrupted in his little speech, in a sort of consternation. 'I am not going to be married. It is all just lies from beginning to end.'

'Oh, my dear, you must not say that. It is dreadful to say that. If we are really to believe you, Lilias——'

'You need not believe me unless you like. You seem to think I don't know my own concerns. But it is all lies, and nothing else,' cried Lilias, with a glow of momentary fury. 'Just lies from beginning to end.'

'Dear, dear me!' said Mrs. Seton. 'My dear, we will not press it too far. But perhaps you have refused poor Philip, and he cannot make up his mind it has been final. If you are so sure of it on your side, it will perhaps just be a mistake on his.'

'Oh, I wish I had refused him!' cried Lilias, setting her small teeth. 'I wish he had asked me, and I would have given him his answer. I would have said to him, I would sooner marry Adam at the inn, I would sooner have little Willie Seton out of the nursery. Oh, there would have been no mistake!'

'But, my dear Miss Lilias, why this warmth?' said the minister. 'After all, if the young man wanted you to marry him, it was a compliment, it was no offence. He is a fine young fellow, when all is said; and why so hot about it? It is no offence.'

'It is just a——' Here Lilias paused, receiving a warning look from Katie, who had placed herself behind backs, but now gave a little furtive pull to her friend's dress.

'Margaret is very angry,' she said, with dignity, 'but not so angry as I am. To be away a whole year, and then, when I am so glad to come home, to have this thrown in my face! It is not Philip's fault, it is just Mrs. Stormont, who never would let me alone—and oh! will you tell everybody? You may say out of politeness that it is a mistake, but I say it is all lies, and that is true.'

'Whisht, whisht, whisht, my dear!' cried Mrs.

Seton. 'If you are sure you are sincere—— No, no; me doubting! I would never doubt your word, if you are sure you are in earnest, Lilias. I will just tell everybody with pleasure that some mistake has happened—just some mistake. You were old friends, and never thought what meaning was in his mind; or it was his mother who put a wrong interpretation. Yes, yes; you may rely upon me, Lilias: if you are sure, my dear, if you are quite sure that you are sincere!'

Lilias went home alone, in high excitement and anger with all the world, holding her head high, and refusing to pause to speak to the eager cottagers by their doors, who had all a word to say. This mode of treatment was unknown at Murkley, and produced many shakings of the head, and fears that London had made her proud. The wives reminded each other that they had never approved of it. 'Why can they no bide at hame? It was never the custom in the auld days,' the women said. But Lilias made no response to their looks. She went through the village with an aspect of disdain, carrying her head high; but, before she came to the gates of the old castle, she became aware of Mrs. Stormont's pony-carriage leisurely descend-

ing towards the river. With still stronger reason she tossed her head aloft and hurried on. But she was not permitted to escape so easily. Mrs. Stormont made her preparations to alight as soon as the girl was visible, and left her no possibility of escape. She thrust her hand through the unwilling arm of Lilias with confidential tenderness.

'It was you I was looking for,' she said. She had not the triumphant look which had been so offensive on her previous visit. Her brow was puckered with anxiety. 'My bonnie Lily,' she said, 'you are angry, and I have done more harm than good. What ails you at my poor laddie, Lilias? Who have we thought upon all this time but only you? When I took all the trouble of yon ball, which was little pleasure to me at my time of life, who was it for but you? Do you think I was wanting to please the Bairnsfaithers and the Dunlops, and all the little gentry about, or even the Countess and Lady Ida? I was wanting to please you: and my Philip——'

'He was wanting to please Katie Seton,' said Lilias, with an angry laugh; 'and he was quite right, for they were fond, fond of each other.'

'Oh, my bonnie pet, what a mistake!' cried

Mrs. Stormont, growing red. 'Katie Seton! I would not have listened to it for a moment! The Setons would never have been asked but just for civility. Philip to put up with all that little thing's airs, and the vulgar mother! Oh! my darling, do not you be deceived. What said he in London? Was there ever a word of Katie? You would not cast up to him a folly of his youth now that he's a man, and all his heart is set on you?'

'Even if it was so,' cried Lilias, 'my heart is not set on him; I do not like him—Oh! yes, I like him well enough. He is just a neighbour; but, Mrs. Stormont, nothing more.'

'Lilias, Lilias, you don't know what you are doing! Oh! my dear, just think a little. He has never come home; he has taken it sore, sore to heart that you left town like that, and never let him know. How do I know what my boy is doing, left by himself, with a disappointed heart, among all yon terrible temptations? Oh, my lovely Lily, whom I have petted and thought much of all your life, one word from you would bring Philip home!'

'I cannot send him a word,' cried Lilias. 'Oh, how can you ask me, when, wherever I go, everybody is at me wishing me joy; and, though

it is all lies, they make me think shame, and I don't know how to look them in the face; but I am not ashamed—I am just furious!' Lilias cried, with burning blushes. 'And then you ask me to send him a word——'

'To bring him home! He is everything I have in the world. Oh! Lilias, you would not be the one to part a mother from her only son; you would not be so hard-hearted as that, my Lily. If he has been wanting in any way, if he has not been so bold in speaking out——'

It was all that Lilias could do to contain herself.

'Do I want him to speak out?' she cried. 'I do not want Philip at all, Mrs. Stormont. Will you believe what I tell you? If you want to get him home, let him come back to Katie.'

'Put Katie out of your mind,' said Mrs. Stormont, sharply. 'There is no question of Katie. It is just an insult to me to speak of her at all.'

Upon which Lilias threw her head higher still.

'And it is just an insult to me,' she cried—'oh, far, far worse! for I am little and young, and not able to say a word, and you are trying to force me into what nobody wants. And Margaret will scold me as if it were my fault.'

'You are able to say plenty for yourself, it appears to me,' said Mrs. Stormont; and then she changed her tone. 'Oh, Lilias, I have always been fond, fond of you, my bonnie dear. I have always said you should have been my child; and now, when there's a chance that you may be mine——What ails ye at my Philip? Where will you find a finer lad? Where will ye get a better son, except just when he loses his judgment with disappointment and love? Oh, my bonnie Lily, he will come back—he will come to his duty and his mother, if you will only send him a word—just a word.'

This conversation was interrupted in the strangest way by the sudden apparition of a dog-cart driven at full speed down the road, which Lilias had vaguely perceived approaching with a little flutter of her heart, not knowing at any minute who might appear out of the unseen. When it drew up suddenly at the roadside for a single moment the light wavered in her eyes. But she came to herself again at once as Philip Stormont jumped out and advanced to his mother, whose evident relief and pleasure at the sight of him touched Lilias' heart. The poor lady trembled so that she could scarcely stand. She could do nothing

but gaze at her son. She forgot in a moment the half quarrel, the pathetic plea which she was urging with Lilias. 'Oh, my boy, you've come back!' she said, throwing herself upon him. Lilias was far too young to fathom what was in the mother's heart, but she was touched in spite of herself. The change in Mrs. Stormont's face, the disappearance of all the curves in her forehead, the melting of all the hard lines in her face was like magic to the watching girl. A little awe seized her of the love that worked so profoundly, and which she had made so little account of. It was true love, though it was not the form of true love of which one thinks at eighteen. She withdrew a little from them in the first moment of their meeting with natural delicacy, but did not go away, feeling it would be somewhat cowardly to attempt to escape.

As for Philip, when he had greeted his mother, he turned from her to Lilias with a countenance by no means lover-like.

'You played me a pretty trick,' he said. 'Lucky for me that I went to Cadogan Place first. I might have been at the station now kicking my heels.'

'Not for a week, I hope.'

'I might have been there all night: and

thinking all the time that something must have happened. I did not take it kind,' said Philip. His mother was holding his arm, and already making little demonstrations upon it to stop him in these ill-advised complaints; but Philip paid little attention. 'I wonder how you would have liked it yourself to be left in the lurch without a word!'

'We were all very sorry,' Lilias said, with an air of penitence, and then she added, 'when we remembered,' with an inclination to laugh, which was all the stronger because of the gravity of the situation a few moments past.

He was somewhat travel-worn, covered with dust, and bearing marks of the fact that he had left London the night before, and had not paused long upon the way. His looks, as he regarded Lilias, were not those of a lover, and as she said the last words he coloured high with not unpardonable resentment.

'I can well believe that you took little pains to remember me at all,' he said.

'Oh! Philip, how I have wearied for you,' said his mother, anxiously, making a diversion. 'We were speaking of you, Lilias and I: and I was going to send a message——'

'You are always so impatient,' cried Philip,

'pursuing a fellow with telegrams as if he were a thief! Yes, I waited a day or two. There was something I wanted to see. You can see nothing while that confounded season is going on. But I'm tired, mother, and by your leave I'll get home at once.'

'You'll excuse him, Lilias,' cried Mrs. Stormont, once more with anxiety; 'he'll pay his respects to you at a more fitting moment. Yes, my dear boy, certainly we will go home; you can drive me back——'

'I've got a dog-cart from Kilmorley,' said Philip; 'and a better beast than yours. I'll just go on in that. I'll be there half an hour before you.'

He took off his hat carelessly to Lilias, who was looking after him almost with as much astonishment as his mother. The two ladies looked at each other as he drove away. Poor Mrs. Stormont, after her agitation and joy, had grown white and troubled. She gazed at Lilias wistfully with deprecating eyes. The situation was ruefully comic, but she did not see it. To have compromised the name of Lilias for Philip's sake—to have compromised Philip by pleading with Lilias: and then to have it proved by both before her eyes how useless were her pains—so broadly, so evi-

dently that she could not pretend to disbelieve it, was hard. She said, quickly, as if with an attempt to convince herself, 'He is wearied with his journey; he is dusty, and not fit for a lady's eye.' But after that the situation was too strong for her; for a moment there was humility in her tone. 'My dear, perhaps I have made a mistake; I will do what I can to put it right,' she said. Then the inalienable instinct of defence awoke again. 'It is just that he is turned the wrong way with all these slights and disappointments, to be taken up one moment and cast away the next. He'll have taken an ill notion against women. Men are always keen to do that. It's their justification; and there is no doubt,' she continued more briskly, nerving her courage, 'whatever you may say now, that he got a great deal of encouragement at one time, Lilias. And now he's just turned the wrong way,' Mrs. Stormont ended with a sigh, slowly mounting into her pony-carriage. Her old servant sat there motionless as he had sat through all this conversation. 'I hope you may never repent your handiwork,' she said.

CHAPTER XIII.

THERE is something in the unchangeableness of rural scenery, and in the unaltered method and order of a long established and carefully governed household, which gives the sensitive spirit, returning to them after great changes have passed over itself, a sort of shock as of pitiless permanence and a rigid machinery of existence which must triumph over every mere vicissitude of happiness or unhappiness.

After the little incidents of the first days, which after all had had little to do with her own personal history, the absolute unchangedness of Murkley, not a leaf different, every branch drooping in the same line, the same flowers in the garden, the same arrangement of the flower-vases to which Jean was so glad to get back (for she had never been able to arrange the London bouquets to her own satisfaction in those terrible glass things in Cadogan Place) conveyed to Lilias a sense of some occult

and secret power of passive authority in existence itself, as separate from any individual will or wish, which appalled her. London and all those wonderful scenes—the lights, the talks, the dances, the intoxication of flattery and delight which had mounted to her head—were all gone like a phantasmagoria. But life, which had been waiting for her just as of old, which had been going on just as of old, while she was flitting through that dream-world, had now taken her in again steadily to its steady routine which admitted no thought of change. It appalled her for the moment; her feet came down, with a power of gravitation over which her impulses seemed to have little or no influence, into the self-same line, upon the self-same path. She tried to laugh sometimes at what everybody called the force of habit, but she was frightened by it. She had acquired a great deal of experience in those six weeks of the season; her memory was full of scenes which flashed upon the inward eye whenever she was by herself, or even when she sat silent in the old rooms where Jean and Margaret were so silent too. And when some one called her, or something from the outer world came in, Lilias felt a momentary giddiness, an inability to arrange her thoughts or to be quite

sure where she was, or which was real, the actual world or that other in which the moment before she had been: Her head seemed to turn round when she was spoken to. To feel herself surrounded by a smiling crowd in rooms all splendid with decoration, flowers, and lights, and fine pictures, with music and flattering voices in the air—and then to look up and see Jean's head somewhat paler than usual against the dark wainscot, and Miss Margaret's voice saying, 'If you will put on your hat, Lilias, we will go out for our walk—' Which was true? She faltered as she rose up, stumbling among the real. She was afraid of it: it seemed to her to be a sort of ghost of existence from which she could not escape.

And in other respects there was no small agitation in the inner consciousness of Lilias. She had felt that there was much in the air on that last evening which never came to anything. The atmosphere of the place, in which neither he nor she had cared to dance, had tingled with something that had never been said. All those weeks, when she had seen him so often, had produced their natural effect upon the girl. She had never deceived herself, like Margaret, as to the many houses that had suddenly been thrown open to them. Lilias had

not forgotten how it had been at the Countess's reception. She remembered the immediate alteration of everything as soon as Lewis had appeared. She had not been allowed to speak to him in the Row, but immediately after all the doors had been thrown open as by magic. She knew very well that this magic was in his hand. And how was it possible for her to believe that it was merely 'kindness,' as she at first thought? It was kindness, but there was something more. She saw not only the tenderness, but the generosity of his treatment of her with wonder, almost with a little offence at the magnanimity which she found it so difficult to understand. Lewis had brought to her everybody that was best and most attractive. She had looked again and again into eyes, bent upon her with admiration, that might have been the eyes of the hero of her dreams. Six-foot-two of fine humanity, in the Guards, in the Diplomatic Service, or, better still, in no service at all, endowed with the finest of English names and possessing the bluest blood, had exhibited itself before her in the best light again and again. We do not pretend to assert, nor did Lilias believe, that these paladins were all ready to lay their hearts and honours at her feet; but

there was one at least who had done so, without even moving her to more than a little tingle of gratified vanity and friendly regret. But from all these tall heroes she had turned to middle-sized Lewis, with his eyes and hair of no particular colour. She had always been aware when he was in the most crowded room. Everybody had talked to her about him, believing her to be his relation. They had all met him abroad; they had all some grateful recollection of his services when they were ill, or where they were strangers; they poured forth praises of him on all sides, till Lilias felt her heart run over. Above even the attractions of six-feet, had been the enthusiasm in her mind for the good and true. She did not indeed want this enthusiasm to turn her thoughts to that first friend, as she had called him in her heart, the first companion who had been of her own choice and discovery, and whose absence had made to her a wonderful blank, of which she felt the effect without fully realizing the cause. But she realized the cause very well now: and felt the day blank indeed in which he had no share.

Also she knew by instinct that something was to have been said to her on that last

evening. Was it merely his disappointment at finding his favourite nook under the palms in the conservatory already occupied, which prevented it being said? or was there some other cause? When they left London so abruptly, two days before the appointed time, without seeing Lewis, Lilias had been somewhat disturbed and wistful. She had wondered at it, however, without being greatly cast down: there was no fear, she thought, but that he would soon follow. He would come after them to Murkley. What he had to say would be more fitly said under the shadow of the great house, about which he too, like herself, had dreamed dreams: he could not stay away, she felt sure. And as for Margaret's opposition, that did not appal the young heroine greatly. All it meant was that Margaret wanted a prince of the royal blood for her child, and not even he unless he were handsome and gallant, a youth to please a lady's eye. Lilias felt a little humorous sympathy with Margaret: she felt that it would be hard for herself to give up the idea of a hero. Lewis was not like a hero. He was like a thousand other people, and nobody could identify him, or say, 'who is that?' as the owners of great dark eyes, and dark hair, at the top of

six-feet-two of stature, are ordinarily remarked upon. Lilias laughed as this thought crossed her mind, and, with a little sympathetic feeling, was sorry for Margaret. For herself she had ceased altogether to think of the other, and she was not afraid that her sister would stand out against Lewis. There would be a struggle: but a struggle in which the happiness of a beloved child is at stake is decided before it has begun. So on the whole, after finding this phantom life more ghostly because there was no Lewis in it, she reflected that when he came it would bloom into reality; and she was satisfied to bear it for a little—until the better time should come.

But when day followed day, and the better time did not come, a curious blight, like the atmospheric greyness which agricultural people call by that name, crept slowly over her, she could scarcely tell how. The earth looked as if a perpetual east wind were blowing, yet as if there was no air to breathe; the skies were all overcast, the trees seemed to dry up and grow grey like everything else: and a certain air of consciousness, a perception that this was so, seemed to come into the house. Lilias perceived vaguely, as she went about with a

heart growing heavier and a dull wonder which went through everything, that everybody was sorry for her. Why were they sorry for her? Jean said, 'My poor darling!' and petted her as if she had been ill. Old Simon even put on a look of sympathy. In Margaret's eyes, there was something the girl had never seen there before. Anger, compunction, pity—which was it? All of these feelings were in it. Sometimes she would turn away as if she could not bear the sight of Lilias, sometimes would be so tender to her that the girl could have wept for herself. Why? for Margaret had never made an exhibition of the adoration with which she regarded her little sister, and it was only at some crisis that Lilias was allowed to suspect how dear she was. They studied all her little tastes, watched her steps, devoted themselves to please her: every one of which indications showed Lilias more and more that they were aware of something of which she was not aware, some reason why she should be unhappy. And she became unhappy to fulfil the necessities of the position. There was something which was being hid from her; what was it? Was it that *he* was only amiable and kind after all, and had merely wished to be serviceable, without any

other feeling? But, if that was so, Margaret would be glad, not sorry; and how could they know that this would make any difference to her, Lilias? But, if not that, what could it be? And every day for many days she had expected to see him, when she walked down to the water-side, or wandered about New Murkley. She had thought that she would meet him round every corner, that Adam at the 'Murkley Arms' would be seen with his cart going for 'the gentleman's' luggage, and Janet hanging the curtains and selecting the finest trout. It seemed so natural that he should come back. It seemed so certain that he must somehow seek the opportunity of telling that tale that had been left untold.

And as the time passed on, day following slowly after day, and he came not, Lilias felt that some explanation was necessary. There must be an explanation. What was it? That Margaret had sent him away? Margaret's eyes looked as if she had sent him away. Was it possible that he could have taken his dismissal from anyone but herself? Then it was that Lilias had hot fits and cold fits of suppressed unhappiness. Sometimes she would be angry with Margaret for rejecting, and with Lewis for allowing himself to be rejected, and then

would fall into a dreamy sadness, saying to herself that it was always so, and that this was the way of the world. But of all these troubles she said not a word, being too proud to signify to anyone that her heart was engrossed by one who had not given her his. There were moments indeed in which she was tempted to throw herself upon Jean's sympathetic bosom: but then she recollected that Jean's story, such as it was, had been one of mutual love, whereas hers could only be that of an unfortunate attachment, words which made Lilias flame with resentment and shame. No, she must just pine and wait until he made some sign, or shake it all indignantly off, and make up her mind to think of it no more.

This was the state of affairs one afternoon when the next event in this history occurred. They were all seated together in the drawing-room, Jean, as usual, working at her table-cover, Margaret from behind her book casting wistful looks now and then at Lilias, who for her part was seated in one of the windows, in the recess, with her head relieved against the light, doing nothing. She had a book, it is true, but was not looking at it; her mind had turned inward. She was pondering her own story, which was more

interesting than any romance. Margaret gave many glances at her as she sat, with her delicate profile and her fair locks, against the afternoon light. The post was late, and Simon brought the bag into the drawing-room, moving them all to a little excitement. Margaret opened it and took out its sole contents, a large blue envelope containing a bulky enclosure.

'There is nothing for either of you,' she said, 'but something of the nature of business from Mr. Allenerly for me.' Then the little flutter of disappointed expectation calmed down, and silence fell again over the room, broken only by the sound of the torn paper and breaking seal, as Margaret opened her parcel. It was a law-document of some sort, bulky and serious. Margaret looked at it, and gave a sharp, sudden cry, which startled the others. The crackling of the paper as she unfolded it seemed to make a noise of disproportionate importance in the stillness of the room; for a law-paper, what could that mean but mere business and money? it could affect nobody's well-being. But the paper, they saw, trembled in Margaret's hands. She could not contain herself as she turned it over. She burst forth into strange exclamations.

'It is only just: it is only right: it is no more

than ought to be done: it is the right thing: no more——' But after a while, she added, as if the words were forced from her—'It is not everybody that would have done it. I will not deny him the praise.'

'What is it, Margaret? What is it?' Jean said.

Margaret made no immediate reply. She turned over the pages, which were many, with hands that shook, and much crackling and rustling of the paper.

'I cannot read it,' she said; 'I cannot see to read it. It makes my head go round. Oh, no, it is no more than justice—it is just the right thing; no more—no more——'

'Margaret, it is something far, far out of the ordinary, or you would not cry out like that.'

'Yes, it is out of the ordinary; but then the first thing, the wrong doing, was out of the ordinary. This is no more—oh, not the least more—than he ought to have done from the first.'

She was so much agitated that her voice shook as well as her hands, and Jean got up, throwing aside her work, and came to her sister's side. Lilias rose too, she did not know why, and stood watching them with an interest she could not explain to herself. Matters of business were not of any interest to her general-

ly. All the law-papers in the world, in ordinary circumstances, would not have drawn her for a moment from a book, or out of the dreamy moods which she called thinking. But she rose now, full of an indefinable anxiety. When Jean had looked anxiously over her sister's shoulder, peering at the paper with wondering eyes for a few minutes, she too cried out with a quavering voice, and threw up her hands.

'What does it mean? What does it mean, Margaret? That he wills it back to her, is that what it says?'

'More than that! There's the letter that explains. He gives it back, every penny of the money, as he received it. It is a great thing to do. I am not grudging him the praise.'

'Grudging him!—it is everything he has—it is all his living. Margaret! You will not let her take it—everything he has?'

'Jean, be silent—he had no right to a shilling. It was hers by nature and every law. I will not deny that, as soon as he saw his duty, he has done it like a man.'

'His duty?—but it is everything! and he was son and daughter both to the old man. It is all his living: and neither you nor me ever thought what was our duty to our father's father. Mar-

garet! Oh! it is more than justice this—more than justice! You will not let Lilias strip him of every shilling that he has!'

This impassioned dialogue, quick and breathless, gave Lilias a kind of half enlightenment, kindling the instinct within her. She came forward with a quick, sudden movement.

'If it concerns me, what is it?' she said.

'There would have been no need to tell her, if you could but have held your tongue,' cried Margaret to Jean, vehemently, 'and now she will insist to hear all.'

'It is her right to hear everything,' cried Jean, as eagerly. The gentle woman was transformed. She was turned into a powerful opponent, a determined champion. Her face was pale, but she was firmer than Margaret herself.

'What is it?' cried Lilias, coming forward. It seemed to her that she was on the edge of some great change, she could not tell what. Her steps were a little uncertain, her looks a little wild. Strange fancies and tremors touched her mind, she anticipated she knew not what. She put out her hand for the papers. 'If it concerns me, will you let me see it?' she said.

'You would not understand,' said Margaret,

with a quiver of her lips. 'It is a law-paper; it is what they call a deed of gift. It is giving you back, Lilias, all your old grandfather died possessed of. It is a wonderful thing. He it was all left to—was perhaps not so ill a person as we thought——'

'Ill!—he was never ill—he is just honour itself,' cried Miss Jean, 'and righteousness and truth.'

'I'm not grudging him his due. The person's name is Lewis Grantley that was your grandfather's companion, and got all his money. His conscience has troubled him. I will say nothing against him. At the last he has done justice and given it all back.'

'Is it only about money, then, after all?' Lilias said, with a disappointed tone; then she looked again upon her sisters, in whose agitation she read something further. 'There is more than that!' she cried.

'Jean, will you hold your tongue! Do you understand what I am saying to you, Lilias? *All* your grandfather's money, which has rankled at our hearts since ever he died. Money!' said she—'it's a great fortune. It makes you a great heiress—it restores the Murrays to their right place—it makes wrong right. It is more than

money, twenty times more; it's family credit, it's restoration, it's your fit place. By the time you come of age, with good guiding—listen to me, Lilias—you'll be able to have your palace, to reign like a princess, to be just a queen in your own country.' Is it wonderful if it goes to my heart? It is more than money—it is just new life for the family and for you.'

'And in the meantime,' said Miss Jean, who had been kept down almost by physical force, Margaret grasping her by the arm and keeping her back—'in the meantime, he that gives it—which he has no right to do, for it was willed to him and intended for him by the man that owned it all, and who was just as well able to judge as any of us—he will go out into the world penniless; he will have to earn his bread, he does not know where; he will have to give up everything that makes life pleasant. And he has not the up-bringing for it, poor lad. He has lain in the soft and drunk of the sweet all his life. It will be far harder to him to give up than for us to do without it, that have never had it. If you hear the one side, you must hear the other, Lilias.'

Lilias, thus suddenly elevated into a judge, gazed at them both with eyes in which wonder

soon gave place to a higher sentiment. It had never happened to her in her life before to be appealed to thus. Margaret took up the word almost before Jean had finished. They contended before her unconsciously like two advocates. She drew a chair towards her, and sat down facing them, listening, a strange tumult of different feelings in her mind. By this time the meaning of what Margaret had said had begun to penetrate her intelligence. A great fortune, a palace restored, a reign like a princess—Lilias was not insensible to such hopes; but what was all this about a man who would go out friendless upon the world?

'Stop a little,' she said, 'Margaret and Jean.' The crisis had given to Lilias an extreme dignity and calm. 'There is one thing that I have first to hear. The man that you are speaking of, that has done this, who is he? Do I know him?' Lilias said.

They both returned the look with a sort of awe, and both were afraid. They could not tell what might come of it; they had known her from her cradle, and trained her to everything she knew, and yet, in the first great emergency of her life, they neither of them knew what she would do. They looked at her taking her first

step alone in the world with a troubled wonder. It was beyond them; they tried to influence the new adventuress amid all these anomalies of existence, but, having said what was in them of their own, were silent, afraid to reveal the one fact upon which all hung, the one thing that must decide all. They did not know how she would take it; they had no clue to the mysteries of that heart which had opened into womanhood before their eyes, nay, under their wings, taking warmth from them. Then Margaret spoke.

'It is right and fit,' she said, 'that Lilias should be the judge. I would have taken it in my own hand, and saved her the pain and the problem; but sooner or later she would have to know. Lilias, the man that is your grandfather's heir is one that we are all acquainted with. He came among us, I will not say with treachery, with what he thought a good meaning. I will allow him all that. We thought very ill of him, me in particular. I believed him a lickspittle, a creature that had fawned to the old man, and got round him. Perhaps I was altogether mistaken: I will acknowledge to you that I was mistaken in many things. And now he has at last seen what was the root of the whole matter

—he has seen that from beginning to end the inheritance was clearly yours. I am not denying that it is a great thing to do. Now that he sees it, he gives it you back out of—I will allow it—a good heart. Here is the gift to you.'

Lilias waved the paper away; her voice was hoarse and weak.

'You don't say who it is. Oh! what do I care for all that? Who is he, who is he, this man—'

'You must have divined it. He is just the young man you have known, both here and in London, under the name of Murray, to which I always said he had no right.'

Upon this Lilias jumped up in a sudden access of excited feeling; her blue eyes flashed, her fair hair shone against the light behind her like a nimbus. She said not a word, nor left time for such in the lightning speed of her movements, but, snatching the paper suddenly out of Margaret's astonished hands, tore it across and yet across with the action of a fury. Then she flung the fragments into her sister's lap, and stamped her foot upon the ground.

'How dares he, how dares he,' she cried, 'send that to me! Oh! it is to you, Margaret! and you would traffic in it; but it must come to me in the end. Send him back his rags, if you

please, or put them in the fire, or do what you like with them. But never, never more,' cried Lilias, 'let them be named to me! Me take his money from him!—I would sooner die! And if you do it, Margaret,' she cried, advancing closer, shaking her little fist in her sister's face, 'if you do it, I will just disown it the moment I am old enough. Oh, how dared he, how dared he send that to me!' Then the height of her excitement dropped, her tone changed, she began to cry like a child. 'So that is what he has been doing, that! instead of coming—and me that wanted him so!' Lilias cried, piteously, her lips quivering. She who had been a dignified judge of the highest morals, and an impassioned actor in one of the gravest difficulties of life within the last ten minutes, sank down a little sobbing girl, struck with the keen barb of a child's disappointment, that infinite sharpness of despair which is to last for ever. To think that he should have been occupied with matters like this and not come to her! She was barely eighteen. The great and the small were still confused in her mind. 'And me that wanted him so!' she repeated, with that little piteous quiver of the lips, and a sob coming at intervals.

The two ladies sat and gazed at her without

a word to say. They exchanged a look. If there was a little subdued triumph in the soft eyes of Jean, they were not for that the less bewildered. Lilias had solved the whole question, not by the tearing up of the paper, which was so easily renewed again, but all unconsciously by that childlike, piteous complaint. Margaret, in the look which she cast upon her sister, acknowledged it as much as Jean did. There was nothing more to say.

CHAPTER XIV.

'My dear Sir,

'Your packet and enclosure were duly received by me, and I think it right, having perhaps misjudged the young man, to begin by telling you that I am now willing to allow I may have been prejudiced, and that there was more to be said than I thought perhaps upon his side of the question. We are all very dour and set upon our own way in this family. Ladies like my sister Jean and me have many lessons to bring down our pride, besides the gift of a judgment not so swayed by personal circumstances as a man's. But Sir Patrick had ever had his own way, and it had no doubt become a law to him. And it may be as you say, that we that were his nearest kin made little effort to gain his confidence. We were led to believe it would have been of little use. In all that, it is just possible we may have been mistaken; and,

though I cannot for a moment allow any justification of his unnatural act in passing over Lilias (though unacquainted with her, which is the only excuse, but that too was his own blame), yet I will avow that to make some provision for a companion that had been so attentive, as I am informed Mr. Grantley was, giving up his entire time to him, was no more than what was just. You will see that, in admitting so much as this, I am going far, farther than I ever thought to do; but his action in the matter being so honourable, and you speaking so well of him, I am ready to make this concession. The deed you enclosed to me is no more than justice, according to my sentiments. I honour the young man for having strength of mind to do it, but I think it was his duty to do it, and my only surprise is that, being capable of that sacrifice now, he should not have done it sooner, and thus remedied the wrong before further harm could arise. Few persons, however, divine just the right moment for an effort of this kind, and I am very willing for my part to give the young man his due.

'There is, however, I am grieved to say, some difference of opinion in this respect among us, always so united as we have been: and it is in

accordance with a desire on the part of my sisters that I have to request you will inform Mr. Grantley that his deed is inadmissible, but that we all think it might be possible to come to some better understanding by a personal interview. If, therefore, he will come here when it is convenient to him, we will receive him. He will be stopping in London, no doubt, till the end of the season; but, having so many friends, we cannot but think it more than likely that he will be coming North to the moors about the 12th or sooner. He will no doubt find his old quarters in the "Murkley Arms" at his disposal, and a personal conference would redd up many matters that we cannot allow to remain as they are. You will therefore have the kindness to represent this to him. I retain the paper in the meantime, but a glance at it, with the commentaries that have been made upon it in this family, will let him see at once that it is a thing which we could never accept nor think of. You will perhaps say to him, in sending this message, that I, Margaret Murray of Gowanbrae (not of Murkley), respect his reasoning and approve his action, which I should in all likelihood have accepted without further comment, if it had been me only that was concerned. But I will

not go against the sense of the family, and I desire that he should be acquainted with our determination.

'I hope you are returned in good health, and none the worse for your London diversions. It seems to me that I have long arrears of sleeping to make up, which is hard to do, seeing no person can sleep more than the time they are used to, whatever the occasion may be. You will make our compliments to Mrs. Allenerly and the young people, who, I hope, are all in good health and giving you satisfaction.

'I remain, my dear Mr. Allenerly,

'Your faithful servant,

'MARGARET MURRAY (of Gowanbrae).'

Miss Margaret was, on the whole, pleased with the construction of this letter. She smiled somewhat grimly to herself as she re-read her sentence about the deed and the commentaries upon it. The one emphatic commentary upon it was that of Lilias, and nothing could be more conclusive. It lay torn in six pieces in Margaret's desk. It was impossible to express an opinion more decisively. There had been a pause of consternation after Lilias' self-betrayal. But the look the sisters exchanged over her was

one in which volumes were expressed. Margaret's eyes were dim with trouble and astonishment. To her, as to so many parents and caretakers, the young creature who had grown up at her side was still a child. She had been vaguely alarmed about her, afraid in the abstract lest she should love unwisely, prepared in the abstract for suitors and 'offers.' But it had not occurred to her that it was possible for Lilias, unassisted, uncompanioned, to leap by herself into the greatest of decisions, and to entertain anything like a passion in that youthful bosom. In some mysterious way, her fears had never settled upon Lewis at all. She had seen her child surrounded by other and more brilliant competitors for her favour. He, discouraged, no doubt, by her own refusal to consider his claims, had been too generous, too magnanimous, she thought, for a lover. And they had parted with him without any harm done. Lilias had been cheerful enough on the journey, not like a girl who had left her heart behind. She had not drooped even when they reached home, though something dreamy, something languid, had appeared in her. Margaret had been entirely re-assured in this respect. But in a moment all this fabric of consolation went to the

winds. She looked at Jean with wonder and dismay unspeakable, and met her eyes, in which there was a subdued satisfaction mingled with surprise. But there was no time to resent that glimmer of triumph. The chief thing was that not the faintest possibility remained between them of doubt or uncertainty. Without a conflict the question was decided. Margaret might struggle as she pleased, it was a foregone conclusion. The eyes of the sisters said to each other, 'This being so, then——'

There was no more to be said. Even Margaret, who would have stood to the death under any other circumstances, felt the arms drop out of her hands. What could be done against Lilias, against that sob, so ungrammatical, so piteous? 'And me that wanted him so!'

Long and troubled were the conferences held between Margaret and Jean thereafter. One of the questions discussed was whether Lilias herself should be called and examined on the subject, but this both decided was a thing not to be done.

'To open her heart to you and me when they have never opened their hearts to one another,' Miss Jean said. 'Could we ask it, Margaret?'

'You think you are further ben in such subjects than I am,' said Margaret. 'But who thinks of asking it? Would I profane her thoughts, the infant that she is? No me! Deep though I regret it, and hard though I take it, she shall never think shame to look me in the face, whatever happens.'

'It is not just that she would think shame,' said Jean, the better informed.

But this expedient was rejected unanimously. They sat together till late in the night discussing the subject in all its branches. It is curious how easy of acceptance a decision becomes which may have been resisted and struggled against with might and main, as soon as it is seen beyond all question to be inevitable. Margaret on that morning would have declared that a marriage between Lilias Murray and her supplanter was a thing she would die to prevent. But, after her little sister's self-betrayal, the impossibility shifted and changed altogether, and Margaret found that the one thing which she would die to prevent, was not Lilias' marriage, but Lilias' unhappiness. The change was instantaneous.

'This being so, then——'

It was all over. There was no longer any

ground upon which to struggle and resist.

As for Lilias, she escaped to her room as soon as she had come to herself and realized what had happened. The girl was two or three different creatures in these days. She was a child ready to cry, ready to commit herself on a sudden provocation, and a woman able to stand upon the edge of the new world which she contemplated with an astonished comprehension of its loftiness and greatness, and to meet its higher requirements with a spirit as high. She felt able to judge in her own small person, with an ideal sense of youthful detachment from all sophistications, the greater question, and at the same time unable to bear the smallest contrarieties without a burst of superficial emotion, anger, or despair. Her development was but half accomplished. Nobody understood this, neither did she herself understand it. She escaped from the observation of her sisters with a sense of impatience, which did not for some time deepen into the sense of having betrayed herself. That indeed scarcely came at all. There was so much else to think of. She went to her own room, and threw herself down upon the sofa, with her heart beating and her head throbbing, every

pulse sounding, she thought, in her ears in the excitement that possessed her. So that was what he had been doing! Not lingering, as disappointment had begun to picture him, in London among his fine friends, dancing, talking as if Lilias had never been; but employing his time, his thoughts in transferring to her his fortune, all he had in the world. Lilias tingled with impatience, with a desire to clench her small fist in his face, as she had done to Margaret, and ask him how dared he, how dared he! While underneath, in her growing soul, there diffused itself that ennobling satisfaction in the consciousness of a nobleness in him, which enables women to bear all the strokes of fate, the loss of their heroes, of their sons, joyful that their beloved have done well. By degrees this higher sentiment swallowed up everything else in her. She sat up, and put back her ravelled hair, and held her head high. There had been an injustice, and, at the cost of everything he had, he had set it right. He had gone beyond all duty, all necessity, and despoiled himself of everything, not, the letter said, 'for love, but for justice.' She was a girl in love, and it may be supposed would rather have believed that her lover had done

something partially wrong for love than altogether right for justice; but those who think so have no knowledge of the ideal of youth. Her heart swelled and rose with this thought. She felt that happiness, that glory of approval which is the very crown of love. The colour came to her cheeks. She jumped up with that elastic bound which was natural to her, and stood in the middle of the room with her head high, smiling at him through the distance and the unknown, approving him. At that moment she felt with pride that the tie between them was not a mere empty liking, a natural attraction towards youth and pleasant qualities, or that still less profound but more enthralling charm of beauty, which so often draws two young creatures together. Lewis had no beauty. There were hundreds of others more gifted than he; but which of them all could have done this, 'not for love, but for justice!' She began to go deep into it, this great action, and to set it forth and enhance it to herself in every way. He had but to have come to her, to have spoken to her as he had meant to do (she knew) that evening, when those two nobodies, those two fools, had taken possession of the corner under the palm-trees,

and she would have accepted him, and this justice would have been done in a roundabout way, not for justice, but for love. But when it came to the point (oh! yes, oh! yes, it was something more than the foolish couple under the palms) his mind had felt that this was inadequate, he had shut his mouth in spite of himself and given over his hopes, and determined that it must be justice and not love. The other would have been the happier way: all this waiting, and suspense, and the separation, and those lingering days without him would have been spared; but this was the better! Lilias felt herself grow taller, grander, in her approval of everything; he had done what was right, not what was pleasant. The growing weariness, the gathering doubt, the film which had seemed to be rising between them, were all made desirable, noble by this issue. He would not have made her suffer, oh, not a day's suspense, if he could have helped it; but it was inevitable, it was better thus——

And now—Lilias caught her breath a little, and laughed for pleasure, and blushed for shy shamefacedness. She would have liked to write herself, and send him the torn up deed, and say,

'What folly! is not thine mine, and mine thine?' but she remembered with a blush that she could not, that it would be 'unwomanly,' that word with which Margaret had scared her all her life, that she must wait now till he came to set everything right. The waiting brought a little pang with it, not altogether to be chased away. 'Of course he will come at once,' she said to herself. But when there is distance, and separation, and all the chances of the unknown between you and the person whom you love, the 'of course' has always a quaver in it. This was all. Her happy excitement, her satisfaction, her triumph in his excellence would have made her perhaps too confident of every blessedness, but for this one faint note of uncertainty which just trembled through it, and made it perhaps more exquisite, though Lilias did not think so. The waiting, which she thought the only pain in the matter, was the perfume, the flavour of the whole.

Next day, Margaret wrote to Mr. Allenerly the letter above recorded; by the time she did so, her mind had worked out the subject. She had grudged the great match which it had always been on the cards that Lilias might make; but, at all events, it was not a long-leggit lad

who had taken her eye, to be a disappointment and vexation to all her future life.

'He is not a fool,' she said, 'that is a great thing, for a fool is the most unmanageable of all the creatures on this earth; and he has plenty of resources, he will not be on her hands for ever; and he must have a kind nature, or he would never have taken such care of yon old man. And he cannot be much heeding about money for its own sake; and he must have a strong sense of justice. And on the whole, though I have set my face against him, I have always liked him,' Margaret said, with a sigh.

'He has just the tenderest heart and the best disposition that ever was,' cried Jean.

'Oh! yes, no doubt you will speak well of him: for he is in love with you too,' said Margaret.

'Oh! Margaret, that is what I like in him—he has no jealousy, as small creatures have. He is just as fond as he can be of those that like her best. He is in love with us all three.'

Upon this Margaret shook her head.

'Not with me—that would be beyond nature —for I have scorned him and denied him.'

'Nevertheless,' said Miss Jean, with the firmness that necessity had developed in her, 'he is in love with us all three.'

The next morning there was a very different kind of scene in Mr. Allenerly's office, where the excellent writer read Miss Margaret's letter with a grin that was somewhat cynical.

'They may try as they like,' he said to himself, 'they will not get him now. I said he was hasty, I said he was premature, but he would not be guided by me.' He stretched out his hand for the newspaper which lay on one side of his table with his morning letters, and ran his finger down a line of small paragraphs: then shook his head when he had found the one he wanted, and, drawing his paper towards him, replied at once as follows:—

'MY DEAR MADAM,

'Your communication I would have had much pleasure in forwarding to my client, Mr. Lewis Grantley, sometimes calling himself Murray, but I regret that that is not now in my power. You will easily understand that, after despoiling himself of everything he had, it was no longer possible for him to live like a gentleman, doing nothing, in an expensive place like London. His friends were all very kind, but he has a great deal of sense for so young a man, and saw that in that there was nothing to trust

to. So he took advantage of his opportunities, and struck when the iron was hot. He had little difficulty in getting an appointment as secretary to Sir Andrew Morton, the new Governor of the Pharaway Islands. He was in good spirits, comparatively speaking, and said the Governor was an old friend, and that he had every hope of getting on well and enjoying the post—which I make no doubt he will, being one of the people that always fall on their feet: which no doubt is greatly due to his being of a very friendly kind of nature himself.

'It is a long voyage, and he did not expect to arrive till September; but, any way, I will forward to him your letter, and he will no doubt reply in good time. The appointment was either for two or three years. It was strongly on his mind to go to Murkley before he left, but there were delays about preparing the deed, for which I, I am afraid, am partly responsible, and I discouraged him, remembering that you would not hear of it. I imagine, by the tone of your letter, that you may have more or less changed your mind; but, unfortunately, it is too late.

'If I hear anything of Mr. Murray during his voyage, I will let you know. I am none the

worse, I thank you kindly, for my London diversions. I avoided late hours and hot rooms, which play the mischief with the constitution. My wife warmly reciprocates your kind messages, and I remain, my dear Miss Murray,

'Your obedient servant to command,

'A. ALLENERLY.'

This letter fell like a thunderbolt on Murkley. They had anticipated not only no such obstacle, but no obstacle at all. They had thought that Lewis would arrive by the next train, throwing aside all his engagements, too happy to be called upon to appear before them and explain all that he intended and wished. Margaret for a time was absolutely silenced by the news; it fell upon her like a stone. Fortunately she was alone when it came, and was not besieged by the anxious looks of the others, which would have been more than she could bear. After she had fully realized it, she sent for Jean and communicated the news to her.

'It will kill Lilias,' Jean said.

'Lilias is not such a poor creature,' cried Margaret, though her very soul was quaking. 'My poor Jean, I do not want to put you in mind of your trouble—but you did not die.'

'Ah! but it was different, very different,' said Jean. 'You cannot put me in mind, Margaret, of what I never forget. It was settled between us, and we understood each other; that takes the bitterness out of it.'

'Some people would say that put the bitterness into it,' said Margaret.

'Ah! but they would be ignorant folk; we were belonging the one to the other; now Lilias, poor thing! has nothing to lean upon. She is just nothing to him. If he were to die——'

'God forgive you for such thoughts! He is a young lad, and healthy, and well conditioned. Why should he die?'

'Others have done it before him,' Miss Jean said; 'but, living or dying, she will feel that there is nothing in it. She has no right to him nor he to her. It will just kill her.'

'Hold your tongue, Jean, hold your tongue,' Margaret cried in dismay.

In the meantime there was no appearance of anything killing Lilias. She had come out of the dreamy state of expectation that had been growing upon her into a cheerful energy. On this particular morning she was as sunny as the day. She had been seen to look at the list of trains, but it was too soon as yet to expect that

he could come from London. She did not speak of him or make any reference to what she looked for; but, when their daily walk led through the village, Lilias lingered opposite the 'Murkley Arms' with an intuition which unhappily brought its own fulfilment. Adam, with his creel over his shoulder, came up as usual with his slow, lumbering tread, and Margaret was too much interested in the trout not to cross the road to look at them. He was turning them over for her inspection when Janet appeared at the door as usual. Lilias thought that she had always been fond of Janet; she said to herself that it was for that reason she had been anxious to assure her that all the fable about Philip Stormont was untrue. She was glad now to see her honest face, and it made her heart beat to think that perhaps Janet might have some news. She responded to her 'Good day, Miss Lilias,' by holding out her hand, an honour which the good woman received as if this little country girl had been a princess, curtseying as she touched it and making her little compliment.

'I am aye blithe to see ye passing; and ye are no looking white and shilpit, as I feared, but just in grand health, and like a rose after your season in London. Miss Margaret has

always taken such good care of you. Lady Eeda she is just like a ghost. They've come hame, maybe you'll have heard.'

'Lady Ida stays longer, and goes out more than we did,' said Lilias; 'but everybody,' she added, with a little natural wile, 'is leaving London now.'

'Oh ay, we'll soon be in August, and you'll no keep the gentlemen after that,' said Janet, with true appreciation. 'It makes more stir in the countryside, but it's little it does for us, and I'm wae, wae for my gentleman that was here in the last year; ye may mind upon him, Miss Lilias. I never could tell what brought him here. It wasna for the fishing, for he was no hand at that, but as pleasant-spoken and as good-hearted a lad as ever stepped. There was one of his portmanteaus aye left here, and I hoped to have him back; but we had word to send it to him a week since.'

'And is that why you are *wae?* But perhaps there may be no occasion for it, Janet,' said Lilias, with a smile. 'We saw him in London, and I think he meant to come back.'

'Eh, Miss Lilias, that would have been a good hearing; but maybe you do not hear that he has lost his siller, poor lad—some o' thae banks,

I suppose,' said Janet. 'It's a braw thing to have nae siller and nae trouble with the losing o't.'

'I think that is a mistake too,' said Lilias, her fair face glowing with pleasure. 'He has not lost so much as he thought.'

'Well, Miss Lilias, no doubt you'll have ways of kennin'. I only judge by his letter, and that was very doun. My heart was wae for him when I read it, and they sailed yesterday. I hope he got his things in time.'

'Sailed!—yesterday!' Lilias echoed, with a wondering face.

'And, losh me!' cried Janet, 'they say it's away among the cannibals. If they sent the sodgers to shoot them down, I would think nothing o't—for them that feed upon their neighbours' flesh, Lord bless us! they're fit for nothing better—but a fine, peaceable young gentleman, with none of those warlike ways, what would they pit the like of him forrit for, just to fa' a victim——'

'Lilias, it is time we were going home,' said Margaret, turning round quickly and surveying the blanched countenance and wondering eyes aghast of her companion.

'Ye are just frichtening the ladies,' said

Adam; 'there's nae mair danger among the cannibals than at hame. They're no cannibal now; do you think that could last, in the face of steam-engines and a' that, and advancin' civileezation and British rule? But the ladies they have mair sense. There's no such things now-a-days. We a' eat ane anither, but it's in a mair modest way.'

'I have no more time to speak to you, Adam; but ye'll just take that trout up to the cook; and come away, Lilias—you have walked too far, your face is just the colour of wax,' said Margaret, anxiously drawing her sister's arm within her own.

'It is not the walk—did you hear that, Margaret?'

'Did I hear what? I just heard that woman Janet havering, as she always does.'

'She said he sailed yesterday.' Lilias made a pause and looked into her sister's face. 'Is it true?'

'Where would he sail to, I would like to know?' Margaret said; then, with a sudden pressure of the girl's arm, 'And supposing it were true? It was what I would have done in his place, if it had been me.'

Lilias' young figure swayed upon her arm, the light went out of her eyes. She walked on

mechanically for a few minutes, sustained by Margaret, not seeing where she went. In those minutes everything was dark to her, the outdoor world, the inner horizon. Blackness came up without and within, and covered earth and heaven. First disappointment, and that terrible prolongation of suspense, the hope deferred that maketh the heart sick, then an overwhelming sense of uncertainty, of insecurity, of the earth failing beneath her feet. All had seemed so easy before. To tear a piece of paper, to write a letter, what more simple? But perhaps now what had seemed so easy might be impossible —impossible! He might never have loved her, he might never come back at all; it might be all a delusion. Lilias did not swoon or lose consciousness; on the contrary, she remembered everything, saw everything in the darkness like a horrid dream; her heart throbbed, her blood all rushed to the brain to reinforce it, to give strength for the emergency; all around her there was nothing but blackness. The sun was shining full upon her, but where she was it was night.

All that Margaret saw outside was that Lilias said nothing, that she clung to her arm, that she stumbled a little in walking, as if she did not

see any little obstacles in the way, and hurried on as if she were pursued, bending her head, her feet twisting with a sort of headlong impulse. She did not know what to think; she said, with a quaver of profound anxiety in her voice,

'My darling, where are you going so fast, Lilias, my bonnie dear?'

These words penetrated the gloom, and brought Lilias in some degree to herself. The darkness quivered and opened up. She slackened her steps, leaning still more closely on her sister's arm, and gradually the common day came back in widening circles, and she began to see the light and the trees. The crisis had been terrible, but her heart already rallied.

'What do you say—about going fast? Do you mean the ship?' she said.

'My bonnie dear!' was all Margaret's reply. And she held the girl up with her strong arm, half carrying her, and hurrying her on the road towards home. Margaret thought she was going to faint and fall, not seeing that she was in fact recovering from the blow.

'Do not hold me so tight, Margaret; you are hurting me. Yes, I was walking fast—I forgot: for I want to be home, home. Oh! never mind

me, Margaret; I am just a little giddy, but I am better.' Lilias freed her arm almost with impatience. 'Why should you support me? Has anything happened to me?' she said.

Then Margaret, who was always mistress, sank into humility.

'My darling, I don't know that anything has just—happened; but you are not strong, and you are worried. I would like to get you home.'

'I am going home,' said Lilias, with dignity.

There was so much noise in her head still, as if all the wheels of her being were working and turning, that she had not much power of speech. But she walked with a certain stateliness, rejecting all aid. And Margaret, who had been sovereign all her life and directed everybody, accompanied little Lilias in the height and greatness of her passion, without saying a word, with a pathetic humility, wondering at her as the people of Camelot wondered at Elaine.

CHAPTER XV.

THE following winter was very dreary and long. It began early; the 12th itself, the beginning of the season, the day of days in the North, rained from morning to night. It never ceased raining through all the shooting season. The rain ran into every crevice, into the holes in the rocks, which were usually as dry as the sun could make them, and the heather grew out of a bog, and the foot sank in the treacherous greenness all over the moors. There was little encouragement to tourists, and not much to sportsmen, and women were kept indoors and exhausted all their resources, and quarrelled, and were miserable. If there had been perpetual bickering in the old castle of Murkley, there would have been nothing surprising in it. The ladies were not happy; they were in a state of painful suspense and uncertainty. They neither knew what the future was, nor when it should cease to be the future, and become an

'I must get the doctor to you,' Margaret said, devoured by alarm lest the delicate spirit should affect her slight body, and harm come of it before their eyes.

'Oh, if you would but let her alone! Can you not see that it's the heart that ails her, and nothing else?' Miss Jean would say.

'Hold your peace about hearts. Do you think I am not as unhappy about what has happened as any person; but I am not going to stand by and see her digestion a wreck as well as——' And Margaret would almost weep in misery, in impatience, in impotence, till poor Jean's heart was almost broken with the impossibility of binding up her sister's, and making her believe that all would be well. For to this, after a while, her desire to upbraid Margaret turned—a desire to console and soothe her. It was her fault, poor Margaret! that was the issue at last to which Jean's sympathetic passion came.

Lilias, who was the most deeply involved, went through an alarming crisis; for some days she said nothing, averted her looks, shut herself up as much as possible, would accept no comfort, nor open her heart to anyone. And in this moment, when the girl suddenly found herself

before the impossible and understood that nothing—nothing which anyone could do could change the fact, could break the silence, could make it possible for her to have any communication with him to whom she had so much to say—that even a hundred chances might arise to keep her from any communication with him for ever, a cloud of utter darkness, and of that sickness of the heart which accompanies the blank of disappointment, took possession of her being. It was against all the habits of her life. Hitherto she had but appealed to Margaret, and all had gone right. Even in the present case there had been an end of all opposition, as soon as it had been made apparent to Margaret what was in her heart: and for a moment it had appeared as if everything was to be well. But not Margaret nor anyone could pierce the silence of the seas, and bring back a reply. No one could stop the ship swiftly speeding to the other side of the world. No one could shorten the inevitable time, blank and dark and eventless, which must pass before any word could be heard across those silent seas. And who was to speak the word? And how could anyone answer for it, that Lewis, repulsed and sent away, would listen, or that he would undo all his plans, and come?

or that he had not changed his mind? He had never said those final words which cast down all walls between two hearts. Lilias had been sure he meant to say them; but he had not done so. And who could tell now if they ever would be said? and who could invite him to say them? To write to him would be to do so. In the retirement of her own room she had written to him again and again to tell him how she had treated his paper, and what she thought of it, her admiration, her pain, and her impatience of his 'justice.' But not one of those letters ever found its way to the post. What were they, when she looked at them again, but invitations, every one? She tore them to pieces, as she had torn the deed, and at last recognised with such a schooling of her heart as is inconceivable at first to the young disciple of life, the unaccustomed sufferer and unwilling learner, that she could do nothing, that there was nothing to be done but to wait, the hardest expedient of all.

Thus it was Lilias, the youngest, the softest, the one whom the others would have died to save, who had to bear the worst, and to bear it in most loneliness of spirit. After a while the others consulted over it, and in their anxi-

ous watch over her, and mutual discussion of every aspect of her face and mind, found a sort of occupation in their distress. And both of them secretly sent out a messenger, a letter —an effort to confront the impossible, and overcome it, which brought them immediate consolation. Lilias could neither write, nor could she, in her shy and delicate youth, unveil her heart to her sisters, or communicate the absorbed and endless preoccupation with which her thoughts were centered on this one subject. She 'thought shame,'—which is different from being ashamed—which is the reverence, the respect which a pure nature has for the new and wonderful passion that is in her veins, as well as her shrinking from a subject which she has never learned to discuss, and which, till it has been made into reality by communication with the person beloved, is beyond disclosure. They talked to each other about her, but Lilias could not talk to them or to anyone, any more than she could write to him. She was dumb. She could do nothing, say nothing. Sooner or later, in one way or another, almost every woman has to go through this ordeal. Poor little Lilias met it unprepared.

It is wrong to say, however, that the letters

which were sent were sent secretly. Margaret, when she recovered from her abasement as the cause of all this trouble, and began to recollect again that she was the head of the family, made no mystery of her proceedings. It is possible that even Lilias knew, though she had no positive information. Margaret wrote, inclosing to Lewis his torn deed, and commentary on the facts of the case.

'You would have done well to see us before you put the ocean between us, with such a grand question as this to settle,' she wrote. 'I know not for how long you are to be absent, or what may be your mind as to other matters, but I would press, as far as it may be allowable, the necessity of personal explanations before any other steps are taken.'

It was thought by Margaret's audience, now consisting of Jean alone, that this letter was very dignified, very moving, and certain to effect its purpose.

'He will be back by the next ship after he gets that,' she said.

'How can we tell,' said Margaret, 'what his engagements may be? He may not be able to leave his post. He has now gotten himself a master; and who can tell if he will be able,

at any inducement, to set himself free?'

'There is nobody that could resist that,' Miss Jean said; but, notwithstanding her confidence in Margaret's letter, she herself, all secretly and trembling at her own boldness, trembling too with a sense of guilt at the falsity of it, the treachery to her sister, the idea of taking any step which she could not disclose, 'took up her pen,' as she described it, and wrote a long letter too, a letter which was full of details, and far more touching than Margaret's. But it was not so dignified, perhaps, nor was it at all ambiguous in its phrases, but said, 'come home' in so many words, and promised all that heart of lover could desire.

And then a great pause fell upon the agitated household. It was to a distant, newly-established colony that Lewis had gone, and in those days there were not steamboat services to all the world, to shorten time and distance; nothing but a sailing ship was likely to carry his letter all the way, and not for a long time could any answer be expected. It has almost gone out of our habitudes now to wait weeks or months for an answer, and even then this old penalty of separation had been much modified; but still there was a long time to wait before they could

hope for any response, and the autumn days closed down darkly over the house which had been interrupted in all its innocent habits by the invasion of this new life. Margaret made a speech to her little sister upon the expediency of resuming all the occupations of old.

'You are but a young thing yet,' she said, 'and history is just an endless subject. How are you to get through life, when you come to be our age, if you know nothing about the thirty years' war, or the French Revolution? You will just look out all your books, Lilias, and we will begin on Monday. There is little use in starting anything at the end of the week.'

To this Lilias assented without objection; but that Monday was very slow in coming. Who could settle down to read history with a girl to whom a message would come in the middle of a lesson that Lord Bellendean in the library was 'Fain, fain to see her, and would not take an answer from me,' a commission which Miss Jean brought upstairs, breathless, one of the first mornings on which this duty was attempted.

'What is Lord Bellendean wanting?—it will be me he is wishful to see,' Margaret said, rising up at once.

'Oh, Margaret, you know very well what the lad is wanting; but he will not take his answer from us. I was just greatly flustered, and I said I would let you know, but nothing will serve him but to see Lilias,' Miss Jean said.

And, after the interview was over, is it to be supposed that a young creature who had just refused a prospective coronet could settle down again to the thirty years' war? Lilias took Lord Bellendean with great composure, but it was not to be expected that she could go so far as that. This was a very great event, as may be supposed. It crept out somehow, as such events do, all the village being aware that the young lord had driven to Murkley all alone that August morning, abandoning even the grouse, and that he had not even stayed to luncheon, but drove back again in an hour, looking very woebegone.

'She will have refused him, the wilful monkey; that is what comes of training up a girl to think so much of herself,' Mrs. Seton said, with a countenance of awe. It took away her breath to think of such a wilful waste of the gifts of Providence. 'If I thought any child of mine would show such conceit, it would break my heart—yes, yes, I am sure it would just break

my heart. Conceit!—what could it be but conceit, and thinking far more of herself than she has any right to think? Would she like the Prince of Wales, I wonder?' cried the minister's wife.

'Let us hope she'll not be one of those that go through the wood and through the wood and take up with a crooked stick at the end,' said Mrs. Stormont, grimly.

It was somewhat comforting to the latter lady to know of Lord Bellendean's discomfiture, too. But she, like Mrs. Seton, felt that the self-importance of the Murrays was almost beyond bearing. Who did they want for Lilias?—the Prince of Wales, as Mrs. Seton said; but he was a married man.

Thus Lilias lost the sympathy of her neighbour. Philip Stormont had shown symptoms of a desire to return to the position of hanger-on which he had occupied in town, but his mother, once so eager, no longer encouraged this wish.

'You will get nothing but slights and scorns from these Murrays,' she said to her son. 'Let them be; they are too grand for the like of us.'

'It was all your doing, mother,' said Philip, 'that I ever went near them at all.'

'It might be all my doing,' said Mrs. Stormont, 'but it was not my doing that you let yourself be left in the lurch and made a fool of by a parcel of women. If you have no proper pride, I have some for you. There's Lady Ida, that is a far finer girl than Lilias Murray, there's no comparison between them; the one is but a country girl, and the other is a titled lady: and young Bellendean has not behaved as he ought. If I were you, Philip, a strapping, personable young man——'

Philip did not stop to ask what his mother's inference meant. He went down in the rain to the river, and pondered the whole business among the boulders in the bed of Tay, up to his knees in the brown rushing water. Here Philip reflected that women were no judges, that he would have none of Lady Ida, who would expect a man to be always on his knees to her, and that, though Lilias was a pretty creature, there was still as good fish in the sea as ever came to the net. He reflected, too, with some warmth of satisfaction, that he was a personable man, as his mother had said, and need not be afraid of showing himself anywhere, and that there was no hurry; for though girls must make their hay while the sun shines, poor things, as for a man,

he could wait. This course of reflection made him respond with careless good-humour to the greeting of the minister, who called to him from the river-side to ask what sport he was having.

'Not bad,' Philip replied. 'I thought I had lost the knack of it, but it's coming back.'

'Little doubt but it would come back,' Mr. Seton said, and they had a talk about the habits of the fish, and the bait they preferred, and all their wily ways, which was refreshing to Philip, and in which Adam Bennet, who was in his usual place, took part.

'They're just as cunning as the auld gentleman himsel',' Adam said. 'They would make grand lawyers, they're that full of tricks and devices; but tak' them when they're no thinking, and they'll just bite at onything.'

'My wife would like some of your trout, Adam, for to-morrow,' the minister said; 'and talking of that, Stormont, there's some nonsense going on in the evening among the young folk; no doubt they will be glad to see you.'

'I'm afraid,' cried Philip across the rush of the river and amid the patter of the rain, 'that I have an engagement.'

'Well, well,' said the minister, good-humouredly nodding at him from under his umbrella as

he went on, 'just as you please—just as you please.'

This was all that passed; and it was not a thing that could be called an invitation, as Mrs. Seton said afterwards. 'No, no; not an invitation: just one gentleman to another, which is as different as possible. We'll be glad to see you, or my wife will be glad to see you; just the kind of thing that Robert says to everybody, for he's far too free.'

But it disturbed Philip in his fishing more than he could have imagined possible. It came into his mind in the morning as soon as he woke, it accompanied him in his thoughts all day.

'There is some dancing or nonsense going on at the manse, I hear—or was it last night?' said Mrs. Stormont at dinner, secure in the confidence that no invitation had come for her son. 'I am very thankful that they have seen the uselessness of it, and given up asking you, Philip.'

'Oh! I can go if I like,' Philip said.

'But you have too much sense to mix yourself up with their village parties,' said his mother.

To this Philip made no reply. His pride was touched at once by the suggestion that he was not asked, and by the idea that his good sense

had to be appealed to. This is always an offensive idea. He did not go up to the drawing-room after dinner. In spite of himself, the contrast between the dull warmth of the fireside, where his mother sat with her book and her knitting, and the lively scene on the other side of the water, struck him more and more forcibly. Mothers are all very well in their way, but they pall upon the sense of young men. He went out to the door, and the fresh, damp night air, as it flew in his face, seemed to carry upon it a far-off sound of the music. To be sure, this was impossible, but it mattered little to Philip; he heard it all the same, he knew the very waltz which at that moment Mrs. Seton would be playing. What need to follow all the steps of the short and half-hearted struggle? They were in full career of gaiety in the manse drawing-room, when Philip strayed in, half afraid of the reception he might receive.

'Oh! Mr. Philip, is this you? You are just a great stranger,' cried Mrs. Seton. 'But there is Alice Bairnsfaither not dancing; you are just come in time.'

CHAPTER XVI.

THE days were very long in Murkley that winter. It was not a brisk, frosty winter, with ice and skating and curling, and all the cheerful activities with which the strong and young set winter at defiance. Everything of the kind, every attempt at pleasure out of doors, melted away in the rain. The roads were deep in mud, the fields were sodden, the river almost in flood, the skies so leaden and so low that you could almost have touched them with your hand—so, at least, the country folk, in their bold phraseology, described them. Jean's table-cover was almost done. She was able to sit at it, she said, as she never had been before. There was little variety in the life of the ladies at Murkley. There had never been much variety in their life; though, now that Lilias was acknowledged to be 'out,' it might have been supposed that their engagements would have increased. But this was not the case. Lilias had signalised her-



self by closing two houses in the county upon them at once. Murray was a name which was not now pronounced before the Countess, who was gayer than usual, and gave several parties, as Margaret firmly believed, for the sole purpose of making it appear that the sisters were shut out.

'But I never blame her, poor woman; for no doubt it was a great mortification,' Margaret said, with proud triumph.

And the break with Mrs. Stormont had never been healed. Philip indeed had returned to his old friendliness, as he had returned to other bonds, but his mother stood out. Thus they were shut up a little more than usual to their own resources, and Lilias, if she had taken advantage of her opportunities, ought to have known all about the thirty years' war. It was a long, long time before any reply came to their letters, and, when it arrived, it was not satisfactory. Lewis had been travelling with his chief. He was so engaged to his chief that he could not get free to answer in person, as he would have wished. He answered Margaret by the intimation that, in case he should die in the meantime, he had left everything by will to Lilias, which was an arrangement which could not be found fault with, though he hoped to find

some other immediate solution when he came home. Even his letter to Jean was subdued and sad in tone. He seemed unable to believe that she was right in the confidence of her hopes; he thought his good fortune had forsaken him, and that it was contempt, not tenderness, which had made Lilias tear up his offering. 'She would not take even her right from my hands.' Miss Jean wept much over this epistle. She avowed that she ought to have understood the perversity of man.

'When you think it is all just plain and easy, and nothing to do but to enter upon your happiness, it is just then that they will turn the wrong way,' she said. They were all somewhat humiliated by the non-success of the overtures which they had expected to be received with enthusiasm. Lilias, who did not know all, felt the discouragement fall back upon her with a sudden sense of failure and shame, which gave an altogether new aspect to life. It seemed to her that she had been offered and rejected; her pride sprang to arms, and all the force of her nature rallied in self-defence. When Margaret addressed her little conclave on the subject, Lilias, with fire in her eyes, would scarcely hear her speak.

'It is possible,' Margaret said, 'that there is

some mistake in the whole matter. We, perhaps, did not understand him at the first, and perhaps we may not understand him now.'

'What does it matter?' cried Lilias, with passion. 'Who is it you are wanting to understand? Oh! will you just forget about it, and never let us say a word on the subject any more!'

'This was what I was going to say,' said Margaret, firmly. 'It may very well be that a mistake has been made; bût it's not for our dignity or for our peace of mind to dwell upon that. We will just consider this a closed chapter, Lilias. There has no harm been done. The young man meant well, it was in his mind to do justice. He had my approval, as ye all know. And no doubt but it was a great effort. For a man to give up all his living and everything he has, is never a small matter. You will mind that even the young man that our Lord loved had not the strength of mind to do that. It is just an extraordinary thing to the credit of the lad that he did find it in his heart to do it. But when his sacrifice was thrown back upon him, which was what Lilias in a manner forced upon me to do——'

'I am glad I did that! I am glad—glad I did it,' Lilias cried.

'Well—I am saying nothing against that. When he has got it thrown back into his bosom, he very likely thinks he has done all, and more, than ought to be required, and there's just an end of it. I have not a word to say concerning Mr. Grantley. He has done all—and more—that honour could require. But now we're done with him, and that chapter closed.'

'Oh! Margaret, bide a little,' cried Jean. 'Oh! Lilias, listen to your own heart; is there nothing there that speaks for him? He is under engagements: he cannot just hurry away, and leave his duty. Give him a little time, and let him speak for himself.'

'I agree with Margaret,' said Lilias, hotly. 'It is Margaret that is right. There has been too much about it—too much! and now that chapter is closed.'

'It is for the best that it should be so,' Margaret said.

'Oh! Margaret, you were always hard upon him! What have you ever done but discourage him and put him away? And now will this be for ever—will you just reject him without a hearing?' Jean cried. Margaret gave her a look in which there was at once judgment and warning.

'There is no hearing,' said Margaret, 'there is nothing but just to put him out of our lives and all the thoughts he has raised. That chapter is closed,' she said, with great dignity and gravity. It was a decision against which no further protest could be made.

And indeed there was a long time in which this seemed a final decision. The chapter was to all appearance closed. Even Jean, hard though she found it, was obliged to hold in all demonstrations of sympathy, to leave Lilias to herself. And Margaret, putting real force upon her inclinations, such as no one appreciated, left her to herself. Jean was coerced by her elder sister, and obeyed with a mute protest, with tearful, appealing looks, with a continual lifting up of her testimony to earth and heaven, against the fate which she could not resist. But Margaret had no one to coerce her, no one to protest against. She was her own tyrant, more hard to herself than to Jean. She resisted the impulse to take her little sister into her bosom, to soothe and caress her, to weep over her, to open up to her all the secret hoards of her own love and tenderness. Margaret, whom they all thought so severe, so contemptuous of sentimentality, had too much reverence for the child

of her adoration to intrude into her little sanctuary of pain, and innocent shame, and wounded affection. It was better for Lilias that no eye should penetrate into that refuge—her mother-sister heroically shut the door, and stood longing, wistful, without. In the meanwhile the household, for no one out of the household knew anything of the matter, was very hard upon Margaret. Old Simon declared to the cook that the pride of her was just more than any person could put up with.

'She'll see that bairn buried afore her een, or she let her wed the lad she likes,' Simon said.

'And wha is the lad she likes?' the maids asked in chorus, all but Susan, who held her tongue, and looked all the knowledge she possessed. Upon which old Simon bid them go all to their work for a set of idle taupies that had no eyes in their heads.

'But I'll never forgive Miss Margaret, if harm comes of it; and what but harm can come of it?' the oracle of the kitchen said.

The wet winter was succeeded by a wistful and doubtful spring, and then by summer gay as northern summers sometimes are, with long days, all monotonous and feelingless, such as oppress the heart. If the year had been



specially arranged to look longer than ever year looked before, it could not have been more successfully done. It lingered and dragged along, never gracious nor genial, a tedious, unfruitful year. And the same change which had come over the seasons, seemed to have come over the life of Murkley. There were no longer the little varieties of old; just as the winter's frost, and brisk March winds, and the caprices of April, and the disappointments of May were all lost in one fretful dulness, so the little impatiences and mock quarrels, the little routine of work and play, the little entertainments and hopes of the past, all seemed to have dropped into one settled rule, rigid and immovable, in which no relaxation or variety was. What she did one day, Lilias did the next, unwavering, shutting herself up within herself. She could not have borne it, had she said a word. The sense of having come to nothing, the defeat and failure of her whole independent existence, cut short and ended off, overwhelmed her both with trouble and shame. That any man could have it in his power to turn all her brightness and hopes, all her youthful gaiety and adventure, her delightful beginning, her innocent triumph, into

a mere episode suddenly broken off, having no connection with the rest of her life, was a thing intolerable to her; nor could she endure to think that whatever happened to her in the future must be like a second life, another beginning; rather, much rather, she would have had nothing happen to her at all, but relapse into the dimness for ever. This indeed was what Lilias thought she had done. But yet now and then a sudden gale of expectation, a stirring of life would breathe over her—as if all were not ended, as if something must still be coming. There were days in which she felt sure that something would certainly come: after which she would rise up and slay herself in shame and indignation, asking herself if she could be so poor a creature as still to wish him to return. But all this passed in silence; and the shame of those relentings, of those renewed disappointments, of those involuntary hopes and awakenings were to herself alone. Thus the year went on. It had passed the meridian, and the long evenings were beginning to 'creep in' a little, soothing somewhat the spirits wearied with this greyness of living. It was a good thing, whatever happened, to be rid of those endless days. Nothing so beauti-



ful when the heart is light, or even moderately tranquil and at ease, but, in suspense or waiting, they were intolerable. Lilias told herself that she was not in suspense any longer, that there was nothing to wait for; but still she was glad when the long days were over, when autumn began to whiten the fields, and a little fire to glimmer in the dark wainscoted rooms. By the end of August that was natural in Murkley. The house in the evening looked more cheerful with the glow of the ruddy fire, and when sometimes, with a sudden perverse fit, she would steal out in the twilight after dinner, the lights gleaming in all the windows gave her a certain pleasure to see. They looked warm, and the world was so cold; they were bright, and it was so dim. What did she know about the world, this nursling of love and tenderness? Nothing at all: only that her first venture in it had turned, as it seemed, into bitterness, and it was the privilege of her youth to generalize, and to adopt as her own experience the conclusions of world-worn men.

She had done this one evening early in September; the year had run round, and all her anniversaries were over: the time of his sacrifice, the time when she had given it back to

him, the woeful day of his departure, all were past. It ought to be all over, she said to herself bitterly; what a servile thing it was to dwell upon every incident in this way, to keep thinking of them when it was clear he thought of them no more. Lilias began to take herself to task. She had taken a plaid from the hall and flung it round her; the evening was closing, the road through the park towards New Murkley was entirely deserted, no step but her own upon it, no fear of interruption. She began to say to herself as she went along that all this was unworthy; that, since the first chapter of her life had been broken off, she must let it break, and begin again; that it was like a slave to cling to the past, to bind herself to a recollection, to let all her life fade into a shadow. As she came in sight of the old visionary palace, with its vacant windows staring into the twilight, there came into her head the bitter fancy of associating herself with it. It was an emblem of her existence, she said to herself—unfinished, all ambitiously framed for life, life on a grand and beautiful scale: but never to be lived in, an empty memorial of what might have been, a house for dreams and nothing else, a place where never fire would be lighted, nor



any sweet tumult of living arise. Oh! it was like her, her great deserted palace, her strong-built emptiness. Lilias stood and gazed at it, rising majestic against the greyness of the sky, her eyes flooding with tears, a poignant and sudden pang in her heart. Could any resemblance be more close? This old house was her fortune, all she had in the world: and she was like it. There was mockery in it, yet sympathy; a vacant place, where no shelter was, a vacant life, in which there never would be any warmth of human interest. The greyness of everything about, the shadow-trees softly waving in the night wind, the faint clouds scarcely rounding against the colourless sky, the mass of building all still and vacant, everything combined to enhance the effect. The two lakes of silent passion in her eyes blurred everything, and made that effect still greater. The old house in the distance, with its glimmers of ruddy light in all the windows, had nothing in it so congenial with her mood. Her castle was like herself, empty and cold, an abode of dreams and nothing more.

Nevertheless, it gave Lilias a little thrill of alarm to see something more upon the broad steps, all overgrown with weeds and grass, that

led to the never-opened door. Though she had been in her own consciousness but now so tragic a figure surveying the tragic desolation of her great house, yet she was in reality only a girl under twenty, in the grey evening, almost dark, out of hearing of any protector, and out of sight of her home. Some one moved upon the steps, and came slowly down and towards her. She was too proud to turn round and fly, but this had been her first thought. If it should turn out a neighbour, all was well; but if it should be a stranger, a vagrant, a wandering tramp, perhaps! Half for pride and half for fright, Lilias could not turn her back upon this unknown; but she stood and waited to see who it was, holding up her dress with her hands, ready for instant flight.

He came slowly forward through the dusk; her heart beat with alarm, with wonder, with displeasure, for no stranger had any right to be here so late. But no suspicion of the reality touched her mind. Many times she had expected vainly, and often, often felt that round the next corner, at the next turning, he might come. But this expectation was far from her mind to-night, nor was there light enough to see him as he came nearer and nearer. He stopped

when they were within a few paces of each other.

'You are afraid of me, but I am no stranger. Ah! you do not know me?' he said.

Then there rang through the silent woods and the grey night a wonderful cry. Lilias was not mistress of herself; the whole world went round and round with her, the great house behind him seemed to move, to break into unequal outlines, to crash together and fall. Her voice sounded like something independent of her, a wild creature crying out in the night. She threw out her hands wildly to grasp at something, she did not know what, to hold by and sustain herself. There was nothing near her except him. He was trembling too. He took her hands into his without any presumption or mistake of her meaning.

'I have frightened you,' he said. 'It is *to* do more harm, always more harm, that I come. But lean upon me, you know that I mean no evil—it is not to take any advantage.'

Lilias did not hear what Lewis said. She heard his voice, that was enough. She discovered that it was he with a revulsion of feeling which there was nothing in her to withstand.

'Oh! where have you been so long—so long? and me that wanted you so!' she cried.

POSTSCRIPT.

(Which is scarcely necessary.)

INSIDE the lighted windows which threw so cheerful a gleam upon the soft darkness of the night outside, Margaret and Jean were seated, with their heads very close together, bending over a letter. They were reading it both together, with great agitation and excitement. The faces of both were flushed and eager; there was a controversy going on between them. Nothing more peaceful than this interior, the little fire burning brightly, the lamp on the table, the wainscot reflecting the leap and sparkle of the burning wood, but nothing more agitated than the little group, the faces so like each other, so close together, lighted up with all the fire and passion of civil war.



'She is beginning to forget him,' Margaret said. 'I will send him his answer to-night, and she need never know. Why should the little

thing be disturbed again? She has had a terrible year, but it is all over, all over now.'

'All over now he has come. In no other way will it ever be over.'

'Oh! hold your peace with your romance, Jean. It was always sore, sore against my will to entertain the thought of him—and now that she has got over it——'

'She will never get over it,' said Miss Jean. 'Oh, Margaret, have ye no mercy in you? Will you let her heart break just for a prejudice, just for——'

'Do you call it a prejudice that the man should be a gentleman, that his father before him should have been a gentleman?——'

'I care nothing for his father before him,' exclaimed Jean, with the energy of passion. 'He is as true a gentleman as ever stepped. I call it just a prejudice——'

'Hold your peace, Jean. Break her heart! when I tell you she is mending, mending day by day. Her peace shall not be disturbed again. I will write to him that it is too late. He is gentleman enough for that, I allow; that he will go away, that he will do nothing disloyal to me——'

'Would you have him disloyal to her?' Miss

Jean cried. 'No, Margaret! I have done your bidding many a day, but I will not now. If you write and bid him go, I will write and bid him stay. He will judge for himself which of us knows best.'

Margaret rose to her feet with an indignant gesture.

'Will you defy me—me, your own sister,' she said.

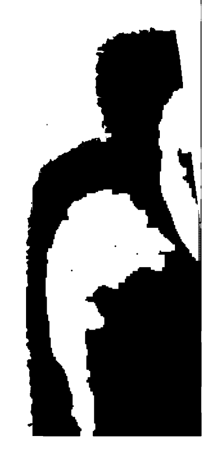
'Oh! Margaret, do not break my heart!—but I will defy all the world for Lilias,' cried Miss Jean. 'She is more than my sister, she is my bairn; and yours too—and yours too!'

'It is for that,' cried Margaret, with something like a sob, 'that I will just defend her to the death.'

'Is it defending her?' cried the other, 'to break her heart?'

'There is no question of breaking hearts,' said Margaret, hurriedly controlling herself, and taking up the letter; 'but, Jean, for God's sake, not a word, for here is Lilias at the door.'

Neither of them remembered, in the excitement of the moment, that the sight of them standing up to receive her, with the traces of their struggle in their looks, must have shown Lilias, had there been no other indication, that some-



thing extraordinary had happened. But that mattered little, as the reader knows. Lilias came in smiling, her eyes dazzled with the lights, her fair locks jewelled with the dews. She kept Lewis behind her with her hand.

'I have brought somebody to see you, Margaret and Jean,' she said.

Margaret let the letter fall from her hand. It was the final throwing down of her arms before triumphant Love and Fate.

THE END.

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Alphabetical List of Surnames assumed by members of Noble Families.
Alphabetical List of the Second Titles of Peers, usually borne by their Eldest Sons.
Alphabetical Index to the Daughters of Dukes, Marquises, and Earls, who, having married Commoners, retain the title of Lady before their own Christian and their Husband's Surnames.
Alphabetical Index to the Daughters of Viscounts and Barons, who, having married Commoners, are styled Honourable Mrs.; and, in case of the husband being a Baronet or Knight, Hon. Lady.
A List of the Orders of Knighthood.
Mottoes alphabetically arranged and translated.

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